

# PROCESSED WORLD 4



**\$1.50 CHEAP**

# PROCESSED WORLD

SPRING 1982, ISSUE 4

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All of the articles in *Processed World* reflect the views of the author and not necessarily the views of other contributors or editors.



*This is the fourth issue of Processed World, and the beginning of our second year. We are delighted and amazed at the depth and breadth of response to the magazine, particularly since the new year. Our letters section has grown again — keep 'em coming!*

*This issue's lead article "No Paid Officials" brings to light a little known piece of recent San Francisco labor history. The story of the Social Service Employees Union offers us a look at a group of office workers who broke with traditional trade union organization and discovered new tactics and strategies. Interestingly, the same SEIU Local 400 that the SSEU broke away from in 1966, has recently become the prime beneficiary of San Francisco's new "agency shop" law. A brief analysis is presented in the DOWNTIME! section.*

*Continuing our "Tales of Toil" series is J. Gulesian, Temporary At Large. Her "Letters From Zona Monetaria" scrutinize the norms of office life in a series of sardonic reports on the hierarchy and cultural conformism around her. Her prediction of a new industry to deal with executive alienation is made believable by a speech we received from friends at Arthur Andersen & Co. In the speech, excerpted in*

*DOWNTIME!, a top company executive pleads with middle managers to believe their jobs are not meaningless.*

*Office life is further explored in Maxine Holz's review of That Office!, a play by and for clerical workers, currently showing around the Bay Area's community theaters. The play's portrayal of "the secretary" focuses on the complex emotions brought out by coping with a subordinate position in the office hierarchy. Particularly good is the way in which the play captures the combination of imagination and humor as the human response to office work. The short story "Traces" flashes us back to Hungary 1956, and forward again to Corporate Office Land 1982, in a juxtaposition of past revolt and current possibilities.*

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*Throughout our magazine's short existence we have tried to describe a different world, a world whose creation we hope to contribute to. What kind of world are we talking about? We have repeatedly said "a world free from authoritarian domination and exploitation" or "a world free from the arbitrary constraints of having to make a living in the money economy." Indeed,*

these sentences do describe in vague terms the world we seek. But what does it mean in this world to talk about such sweeping change?

Of course, we do not have nor do we want to have a blueprint for a new society, but we do think it vital to begin imagining how things could be different. The first step in this direction is to thoroughly criticize all existing societies. We don't want our goal mistakenly identified with any variant of "free market" Western capitalism or of the "communist" state capitalism of the USSR, China, Cuba and the rest.

We are interested in a classless, state-less society, where decisions about daily life are made by those most directly affected by the consequences of the decisions. Sometimes this might mean a highly decentralized, locally-based decision-making process. Other times, it might mean a need for decision-

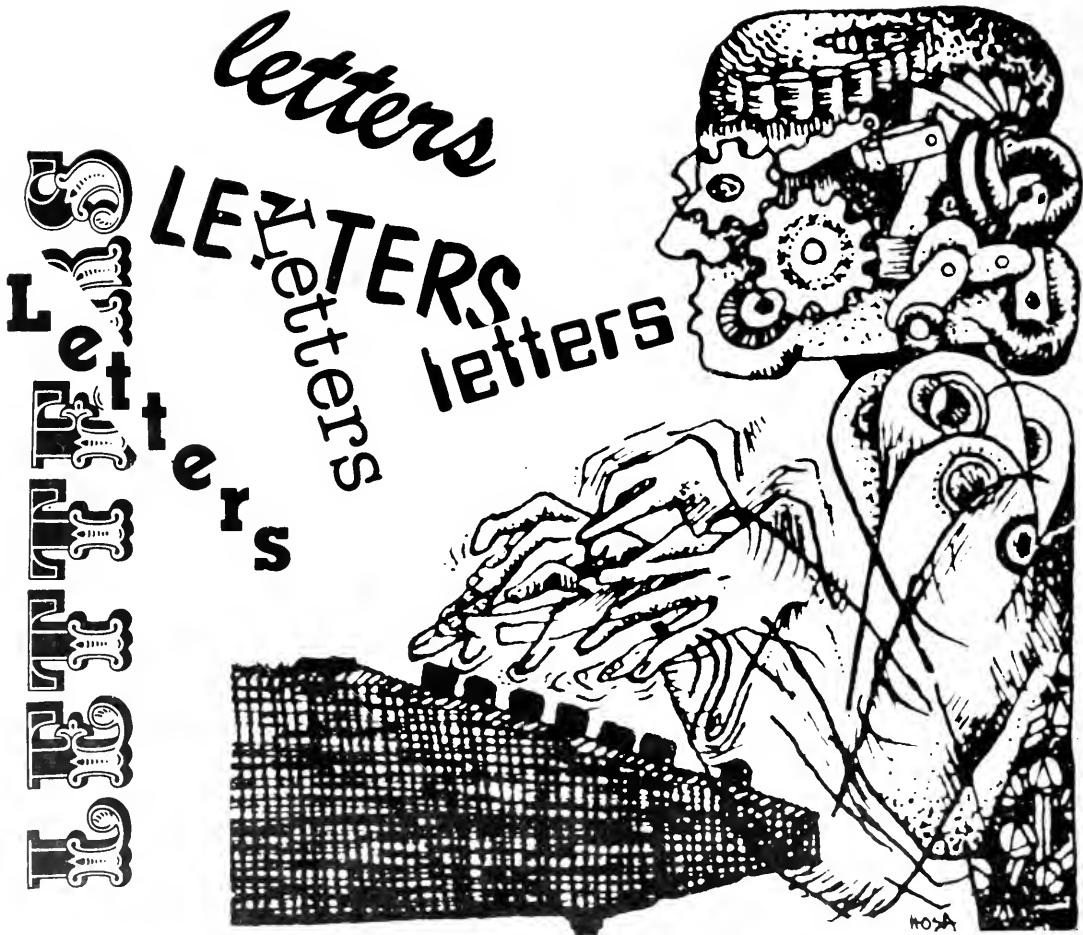
making coordination on a continental or even a global basis (for instance, over major ecological questions or to deal with natural disasters, shortages, etc.). Either way, this means a society of free individuals, capable of coping with social problems in a direct and conscious way, beyond present-day "needs" like the maintenance of profits and power structures.

Again, these are fairly general principles of a new social arrangement. We consider PW an outlet for more concrete explorations of utopian ideas and hopes.

We want to begin examining the problems of getting from here to there, as well as what we would like "there" to look like. We hope PW readers will contribute their thoughts and experiences to this quest. Keep sending us your letters, articles, stories, graphics, drawings, etc.



**Processed World — Made in Our Living Rooms**



Dear PW:

Hey! We just got a great idea! If you can't beat them, join them!

We should start up our own temporary agency and call it RED ROVERS: (of course, the slogan could be "Red Rover, Red Rover, send someone right over") the kick is that they are quiet fomenters of revolution, distributing pamphlets, and generally spreading the Word.

If not a reality, it would make a great story...

E. — San Francisco



Dear Processed World,

I have come across a small example of your journal within my **CoEvolution**, Winter 81. Enclosed is my check for \$10 for my sub.

I am impressed with what I read and I'm looking forward to reading an entire edition.

My situation? I'm not even sure I know what it is. At present I am a Systems Software Clerk for a large oil company. I've been with them a bit longer than two years. I "enjoy" my job, it is diversified and keeps me busy. I do a lot of data entry, arranging and running reports, and miscellaneous. My co-workers have educated me in several systems. But...

"They" tell me business is the only decent major (I attend a community college part-time and will have my AA by '83 — at last,

my major being education — secondary). “They” tell me I should learn Cobol and Fortran to get **somewhere** from where I’m at. I’m not motivated to. I don’t want to be a Programmer. But if I say that, I appear ungrateful. Dumb broad in their eyes. “They” laugh when I confess my major is education. (But telling some my major is Philosophy keeps them quiet and at a distance!)

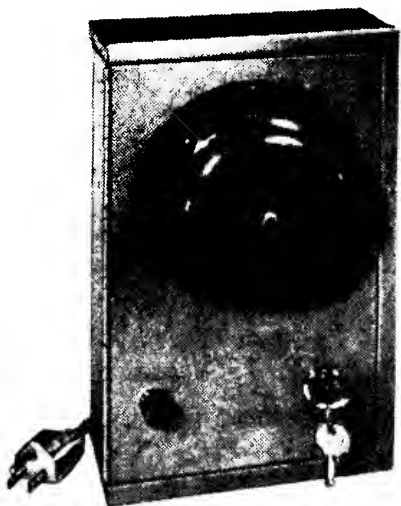
Big Business is not where I want to be — with dept. vs. dept., manager vs. manager, politics and high finance. No — that’s not for me. But then I do seem to need the money. I’ve been divorced for nearly six years and I support two children, 11 and 10, one of whom is crippled and blind. Can I afford to drag them off on my dreams and move to Maryland or Colorado — or can I afford not to?

I’d like to be involved with teaching and communication. The back to basics approach. I want to be involved in building a society my kids and I can survive in, have friends I can trust, and be with

people who can love and allow others to love them. Those people seem rare to me. So many seem frightened by kindness, by love. Fear is understandable. There are a lot of confused and violent people to contend with. But running, hiding, is not the answer. What is the answer? Perhaps that is why I am writing. It seems strange to put this on paper. Strange to send it off to people I don’t know. But maybe your ideas can help me. My dream is to have that BA degree before 1988 — (part-time takes forever!) Still, that seems like a long time to just get by. Hopefully, I can get some educating experience by teaching at my church once a week. Do I have better choices? I hope so.

In any case, I’ll be looking forward to your journal and your ideas. Thank you for this opportunity to write. Perhaps I will be able to contribute to **Processed World** at some future date.

Sincerely,  
L.S. — Parma, Ohio



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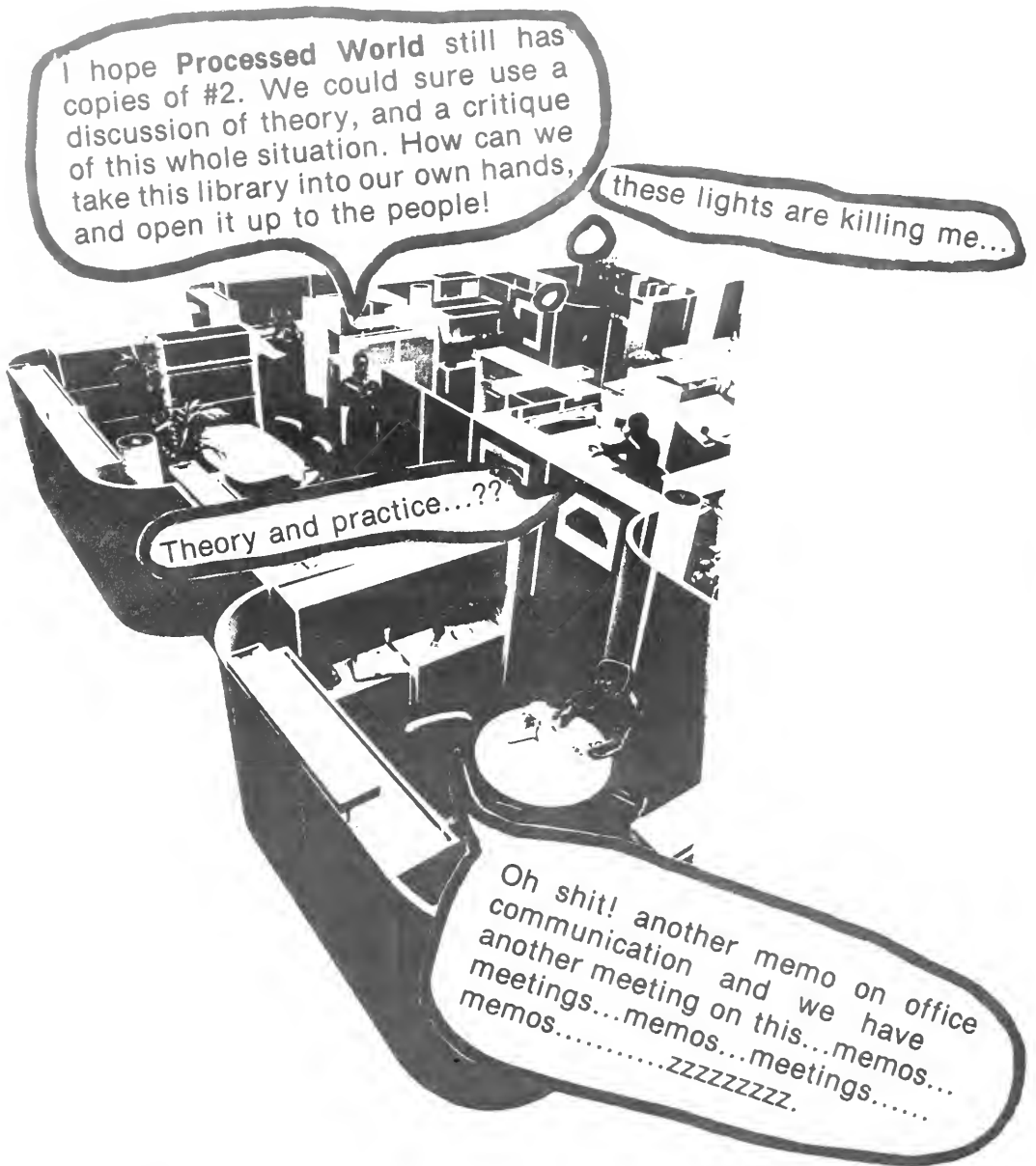
From A Reader in Detroit

Dear L.S.,

All of us at Processed World were very touched and pleased with your letter. I think the frustrations and desires you expressed are widespread — which is partly what inspired us to publish in the first place. Our project, in the most immediate sense, is to help validate and encourage dissatisfaction with what this world offers us. The

source of so much difficulty in “coping” stems more from the society we live in than from individual failure. If people stop blaming themselves, and stop trying to fit into the established models, maybe we can begin acting to change the whole set-up.

It would be facile and pretentious to claim that we have “answers” to the situations of individuals trapped



From office workers at Stanford



## HELEN WRITES HOME

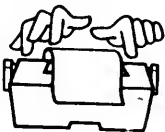
Dear Dad,

Why did I do it? Become part of PW magazine that is. Well, I was working at BofA, and it was ultra-beige in spirit and surroundings. At this time I entertained a mild flirtation with local Working Women *aficionados*, but their respectability and "proper channels" emphasis was *très ennui* and a big yawn besides. So when a kindly temp worker told me he had heard reports that crazy people in the financial district were wearing VDT heads and shouting in the streets about office work, and when I ran into these same people during my lunch break, I felt, shall we say... sympathetically inclined.

At first I was misled by the "professional" appearance of the magazine and was surprised to discover that it was put out by a small group of friends, all of them office peons like yours truly. My remaining two months at BofA were made a little easier by knowing other people who shared my rage about selling 40 hours a week to a place where too often your most intimate and scintillating companion is a typewriter. I met people who questioned office work very deeply — both in the abstract and at the eminently practical level of how to survive in the oh-so-cheery office of today, while at the same time striking against it.

You keep waiting, but if my rebelliousness is just a phase I'm certainly taking a long time to grow out of it. I show no signs of reaching for a steady, prestigious job. I work for Mr. Big as little as possible. And when I'm "Mr. Big's Girl" I try to get the best deal for myself and steal back my time, creativity, and self-respect in whatever ways are possible. **PW** helps invent more possibilities.

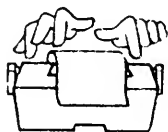
Maxine



Well, that's enough for now Dad. In my next letter I'll tell you if crime pays, how much, who's hiring and how you have to dress for the job. Send my love to Snoodles, Chopper and Betsy.

Bye now.

Love, Helen



Greetings—

I read the first two issues of your journal while visiting Vancouver. I could identify with personal contradictions of being an intellectual doing unskilled labor since I have always done menial manual labor myself. My current position is as a laborer on the garbage trucks for the City of Toronto.

I don't mean to denigrate your more theoretical insights by discussing the personal contradictions involved in unskilled labor. Indeed I found your overall analysis of work and not-work to concur very much with my own ideas. But over the 8 months that I worked as a garbage laborer, I have become much more aware of the elitism of the left and their misunderstanding of people who choose non-careerist survival options.

My own position is summed up by paraphrasing the old dictum; "employment if necessary, but not necessarily employment." I know that I have other options, so to speak, i.e. retraining in computers or electronics for instance, but I feel so alienated from this system that I find it difficult to direct my energy to increasing the social value of my skills when the only benefits that I will receive out of it is security and the remote possibility that my work will be more interesting. Otherwise any benefits certainly go to the



*Relaxing at the Highwater family bungalow.*

abstract extraction of surplus value.

Compared to most people that I know in Toronto, I prefer my alienation straight. When one does manual, unskilled labor, there is no way that one can mystify oneself into thinking that one is working for some social or political good. One works for survival and for some extra income to fund personal/political projects. But the careerists lose that clarity. Their politics and their careers begin to dovetail into each other. They become more concerned with their resumé than with their lives.

It was interesting to tell people what I did. People's responses on hearing that I was a garbage laborer were readily divisible into two distinct categories. One was quite pragmatic. They were interested in how much money (good), working conditions, i.e. outside work, physical work, time for which we were paid that we didn't have to work, etc. The second category of responses was generally a non-response, usually a polite silence at best. After a while, I almost enjoyed maliciously telling people quite bluntly that I worked on garbage to shock them a bit.

I had only recently moved to Toronto and it was quite a different left to what I had ever been around before. In the other cities that I had

lived in, lefties (using the word very generally) were usually marginals or workers or some unbalanced combination. But in Toronto there is no large culture of marginalization as there was in Kitchener or Vancouver. I just had never had much contact with people who actually thought in career terms. It seems so unfortunate that people direct their energies towards an end that is not at all in opposition to the Machine. At best, they work 35 hours a week for the system and ten hours a week against it.

J.C. — Toronto



Dear P.W. People;

I was given your excellent publication by a guy in a very fetching detergent outfit (TIED) on the corner of Carl and Cole on the 24th of December. As I didn't have a dollar on me at the time I promised to mail it in. So, for once, the check IS in the mail!

Keep up the fight-  
L.A. — San Francisco

p.s. - I typed this on company paper, on company overtime and put it through the official postage meter. Pay ME shit, will they?



Dear **Processed World**:

In her dialogue with the person who participated in the United Stanford Workers organizing drive, Maxine Holz counterposes "direct action" to "unions." As a person who has also participated in white-

collar union organizing — and who sympathizes with **Processed World's** viewpoint, this immediately provokes certain questions in my mind: How can direct action in opposition to the employers be a collective activity of a workforce without mass organization? And isn't any mass organization which tries to bring together all the workers who are prepared to fight the boss an expression of some kind of unionism?

Even your "informal groups" can be an affirmation of unionism. Imagine that a group of office workers, who have gotten to know



each other from working together for months in the same office, decide to ask the boss for a raise as a group. Such an incident of workers acting **in union** is an embryonic form of unionism.

Direct action will only lead people "to think and act in ways that will lead to the kinds of changes in



“If you think your life is wasting away in the office, Raise Your Hand!”

society that have been discussed in the pages of **Processed World**” (as Maxine says), if it is **collective**. For sure, it can feel great to sabotage the company’s computer or rip off supplies from the employer (at least, I’ve gotten a sense of satisfaction from doing it), but isolated acts of individuals won’t bring workers to an awareness that we have the potential power to transform the world in the direction of freedom from domination and exploitation.

Most people seem pretty skeptical about proposals for sweeping change. It’s this feeling that we’re just powerless individuals that will incline people to reject ideas of fundamental social change as “unrealistic.” If “the feeble strength of one” describes your perception of your situation, you’ll tend to strive for what you can get as an individual within the system. Collective action can alter the sense of power that people have because it changes the real situation from atomized individuals, cut off from each other, to the power of worker solidarity. Especially when the action and solidarity among working people spreads beyond the “normal” channels and unites — and brings into active participation — ever-larger sections of the workforce — as in the recent movement in Poland. Movements on that scale begin to create the sense that it’s “up for grabs” how society is organized. And if it’s up for grabs, then efforts to change society in a freer and more humane direction seem more realistic to people.

It’s also during these periods of heightened struggle and mass participation that workers move to take over more direct control of their struggles with the employing class and in the process, create more independent ways of organizing their activity, free of top-down

control. For example, during the "hot autumn" of 1969 in Italy workers at the Fiat and Alfa-Romeo auto plants created mass assemblies, organizations of face-to-face rank-and-file democracy outside the framework of the hierarchical unions.

This happens because the top-down structures of such unions make them unsuited to carrying the struggle beyond the "normal" channels. The officials who run them, with their bureaucratic concern for avoiding risks to their organizations (and their status), will work to contain struggles within the framework of their longstanding relationship with the bosses.

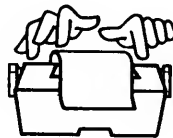
Thus, "union" can refer to top-down structures whose separation from the rank-and-file invariably means that they will act to contain worker protest within bounds acceptable to the powers-that-be. Or "union" can refer to a form of association that is just the rank-and-file "in union," a mere means to get together and come to agreement on common goals and common action in dealing with the employers. I think tendencies in both directions have always been present in labor history.

Effective direct action means workers have to get together. "Informal groups" can be helpful in developing unity but I think mass organization on a larger scale is called for if working people are to develop the power to make the sort of social changes you have been talking about. Besides, "informality" does not guarantee that an organization will be self-directed by the rank-and-file. Informal hierarchies can develop.

And the kind of "union" that is run directly through mass meetings of all the workers is important, not just because it would be a much more effective tool in fighting for

what we want right now, but also because mass organizations of this kind contain the premises of the kind of society we want to create "in embryo" — a society without bosses, free of the exploitation of some people by others, a society of genuinely free and equal humans.

For a world without bosses,  
R.L. — SF



**RE: HENRY ADAMS'  
THE VIRGIN AND THE DYNAMOS  
AND THE SENSE OF BEING A  
LITTLE BALL BEARING IN THE  
GENERATOR THAT POWERS  
THE ELECTRIC CHAIR IN A VAST  
PROVINCE DEDICATED TO EXE-  
CUTION IN THE QUIETEST MAN-  
NER POSSIBLE**

Dear **PROCESSED WORLD**:

The other day as I walked into Standard Oil's 575 Market Street building, I was suddenly saddened and felt hopeless. The change was so abrupt that I had to analyze it. Now, the metaphor is commonplace but what it signifies is still significant and worth considering in some depth — that is, the metaphor of being a small part of a machine.

We talk about the corporate machinery. We recognize that efficiency is the main aim of a machine. Heat loss from friction, wear and eventual breakdown, production of inferior products, consumption of fuel — these are the kinds of losses which technicians seek to minimize when they work on a machine. Each part of a machine should perform the same way each time it is called upon. There should be no random

behavior of the parts. The machine should do what you want it to.

Only a certain kind of person makes a good machine part. Our most valuable people are those who do not make good machine parts. They produce unexpected and inexplicable things like art, theory, humor, stories — things which derive their value from their singularity.

The idea of having a machine made of humans is not a good idea. Humans do not perform with regularity, except for those few like Sergeant Ed Bowers, a redcoat guard in 575 Market who would do well behind a desk in a novel by Franz Kafka, who, in fact, may have screwed up his courage and walked right out of a novel by Franz Kafka into the lobby of 575 Market. My problems with Mr. Bowers are the problems of a human being trying to relate to a cotter pin in a mill wheel.

Faulkner worked on a dynamo when he was writing **AS I LAY DYING**. The hum of the dynamo was a pleasant sound. He could think out there, and he only had to get up every now and then to stoke the fire. I'm speaking generally, and I'm really opening my position wide to criticism by doing so, but let's just say that the dynamo and all it stood for still left humans with a private dignity. Nobody's saying that back-breaking work is terrific, and I hope I'm avoiding any tendency to eulogize physical labor, much as we might eulogize the lives of peasants because they are tied to the ground, or the poverty of blacks because they have soul. I am saying that physical labor does not threaten to insidiously change the worker's mental processes to the point that the worker suffers confusion and is psychologically malleable.

Say a worker has to move a hundred boxes a day. His body gets used to moving boxes. He begins to

look like somebody who moves a hundred boxes a day. Say a worker has to move a hundred pieces of information a day. His mind gets used to moving information. Say the boxes contain radioactive materials. The worker suffers not from the work but from the content of the stuff he works on. Say the information contains the elements of fascist state control, the ideas of subordination of the individual, submission to rules, threats. The worker suffers not from the work, but from the content of the work. A philosophy gets transmitted like a virus.

What we do not see hurts us. The transmission of disease long remained a mystery. It is transmitted by things we do not see.

The long range danger of having corporations organized like feudal estates is that you infect a democratic people with feudal germs. It is information that shapes people. The mover of boxes may go home and read Schopenhauer. The mover of information is fatigued with the movement of knowledge, and goes home to exercise.

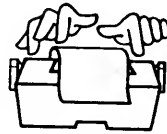
Even a mill worker, who works in a machine (a factory is a large machine) can at least readily identify that aspect of his life that is machine-like, and has the mechanical model before him to rationalize the routine to which he is subjected. The machine has to work this way to make flour, or cloth. But the office worker is asked to accept routine as a **way in itself**. The worker in the modern bureaucracy is taught to accept routine as a way of operating. The rules of the machine thus take on the character of arbitrary control rather than justifiable control. We learn to submit to authority as a general rule, and not as a necessary exception to the rule of individual freedom.

I work as a temporary at Standard Oil and I don't have time to work on



this letter any more. I realize the arguments are not fully developed but this is a first and last draft. And that's that.

C.D. — San Francisco



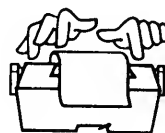
EEEEEEEEEE **Processed World #3**; high, y'all, really do hope these words find you in the very best of health and determined spirits.

I really enjoyed that, and I've sent it into the mid-west to a few friends, one of whommm works as a secretary at the Denver mint, so maybe y'all better get ready for some strange lookin' change, hmm...

...Being in prison and now in the hole (for my attitude) I of course am deprived of access to resource material — and am kind of 'out of it' so far as what's happening and like that. I've been good for several weeks in a row, so how do you feel about communicating more often — you know, like maybe some of the flyers laying around or back issues of the **World**?

Anyway, I really do like your style — god! When the young ones begin to communicate in kind, these pyramids will... be reconstructed and mean something more than a procession into degrees of bondage. Nevertheless, take care,

Sincerely,  
one of the  
Rainbow Dragonfly



Forgotten History of San Francisco

# NO PAID OFFICIALS

The Social Service Employees Union  
A Free Union

“Without the historical experience of unions, **union** meant “the act of uniting and the harmony, agreement, or concord that results from such a joining.” Significantly, then, the definition of the word **unionize** is “to cause to join a union; to make to conform to rules, etc. of a union.” The beauty of the words “harmony, concord, agreement” are lost in the oppressive implication of the words “to cause to join” and “to conform to rules, etc.” SSEU then, by my experience, is a **union** that does not try to **unionize**.

I am in **union** with SSEU as a group of individuals. I am not a member of a union... I feel that there are many people like myself who don't like listening to the rhetoric, jargon and propoganda of union meetings and union leaders; who don't like organizations or individuals which make unilateral decisions that affect the lives of many people.”

—Cree Maxson, May 28, 1974  
The Rag Times, Vol. 1, No. 16

The Social Service Employees Union of San Francisco appeared in 1966, just as a widespread revolt was sweeping the country. While most people look back at the 60's as a time of urban riots, the anti-Vietnam war movement, hippies, drugs and rock 'n roll, the SSEU represented a now-forgotten convergence of cultural and worker rebellion.

The SSEU aspired to be completely democratic. Its activities were carried on by the workers themselves, on their own time and sometimes on work time. Decisions about union activities were made collectively by both union and non-union workers. During its entire existence (between

approximately 1966 and 1976) it had no paid officials and signed no contracts with the Welfare Department management.

The 200+ workers involved in SSEU at its peak evolved a unique strategy for improving their own conditions as workers and for challenging the basic authoritarian relations that prevailed (and still prevail) around them. This strategy depended on the diverse and wide-open media they created, consisting of uncensored newspapers and leaflets. It was also based on a dialogue/confrontation process between the workers and their managers, welfare administrators, and government officials.



**BUREAUCRATS!**

*Never Be  
Lonely  
Again!*

**INTRODUCING THE ALL-NEW  
"Bureaucrats In A Briefcase"  
Briefcase!**



*Frank Thompson, Director of Personnel Management:* My wife and I were vacationing in sunny Acapulco. It was great... but something was missing. I yearned for petty details, meaningless routines, and underlings. Then I remembered, my wife had packed my "Bureaucrats In A Briefcase" briefcase. Boy, was I relieved!!

*William J.P. Richards, Loans and Securities Officer:* One night an old college chum took me to a *wild* party south of Market. Luckily, I didn't forget my "Bureaucrats In A Briefcase" briefcase. Just a flip of the latch unleashed a team of normal American businessmen! They saved my evening!!

**Available from the Nerdley Briefcase Co.**

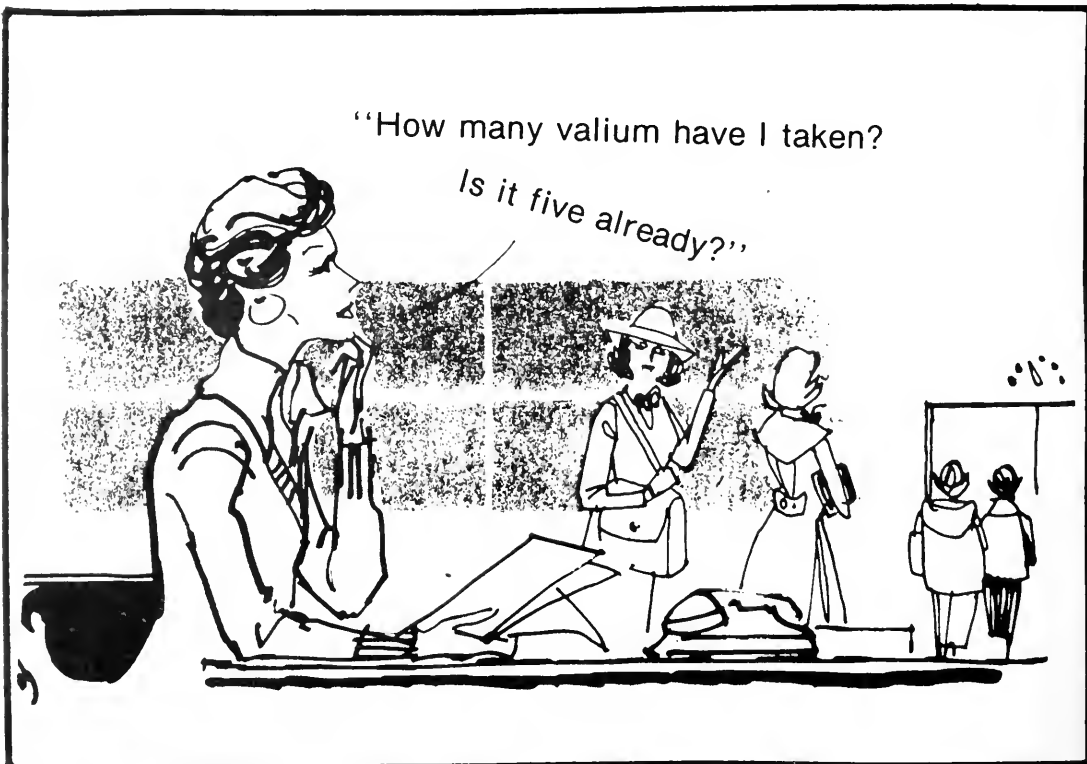
## THE TRADE UNION AS AN OBSTACLE

In early 1966, some welfare workers banded together to defend co-workers from summary dismissals. They also began formulating and pressing a number of grievances. As soon as workers acted for themselves, however, their union (Building Service Employees International Union — BSEIU — Local 400, which later changed into SEIU) became as much an obstacle to their efforts as their employers.

For example, one of the first grievances raised was over space. People worked at desks jammed together in cramped quarters. When the welfare workers discovered a space code in the state regulations requiring more space-per-worker they wrote letters of complaint to the Social Services Commissioner and the State Dept. of Social Welfare. They gave them to their union to send, but found out later that the union hadn't sent either.

Shortly thereafter the Executive Secretary of the union chastised the welfare workers for sending irate letters to administrators who were his friends, and with whom he had political understandings. In response, the workers demanded to have the question of union representation put on the agenda of the next union meeting.

The next meeting, obviously stacked by friends of the union's leader who owed him favors, had the largest attendance of any in the local's history. Then-Executive Secretary John Jeffrey pushed measures through which dissolved the union's welfare section, abolished the workers' uncensored "Dialog" newspaper, barred Dept. of Social Services (DSS) workers' leaflets, and prevented welfare worker members of the union from holding meetings at Local 400's office or electing any union officers to represent their section. About fifty of the affected workers then decided to start an independent union, which was named the Social Service Employees Union (SSEU).



## Statement on the Goals and Methods of Social Service Organization

...adopted by the San Francisco SSEU General Membership  
Meeting of September 20, 1967

Many of us have the growing feeling that our backs are up against the wall, that the **administration** is regulating us out of doing any meaningful work.

If we are allowed to retain our jobs without being fired, we are forced to live in degradation. A great fear of losing one's job, of losing the benefits of the society we live in, vies with a sense of repression all about us. We must do something about it.

The only method of survival is to fight back. We have rejected running. There is nowhere to go, and we cannot run fast enough. To join the dehumanizing Establishment is impossible. It is giving up on ourselves. But the individual cannot fight back alone. The only gratifying and effective method is to fight alongside and to enjoy the full support of others.

In order to do this, to persuade others to help us and to join them in helping themselves, we try to make our union a place where people can come to satisfy their needs. We do not put the organization first. We do not ask the people who join with us to go beyond the limits they want to go. We are oriented to our members and to everyone else who shares our work. All people, union and non-union, are encouraged to participate in each struggle, and in deciding what the union should struggle for. Grievances are fought for non-union members, as well as union members. Our goal is for people to use the union organization in deciding their own lives.

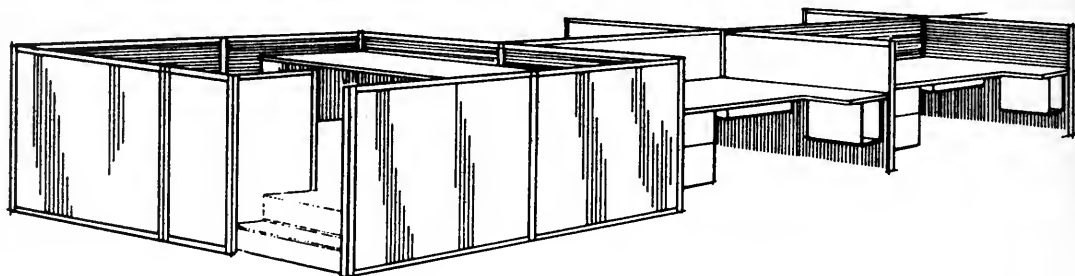
Business unionism, based on control from above, imitating and collaborating with management power structures, cannot achieve this. We do not want to fall into the same traps as the AFL-CIO. Only an organization that functions as a popular movement of its members, and is controlled by them, can enable them to survive and develop as human beings.

People can exert control over their work lives only through organizing. Through rank-and-file organization social service workers can make the policy and determine the programs that define their work. Union organization which is not designed for its members to operate the union frustrates these efforts.

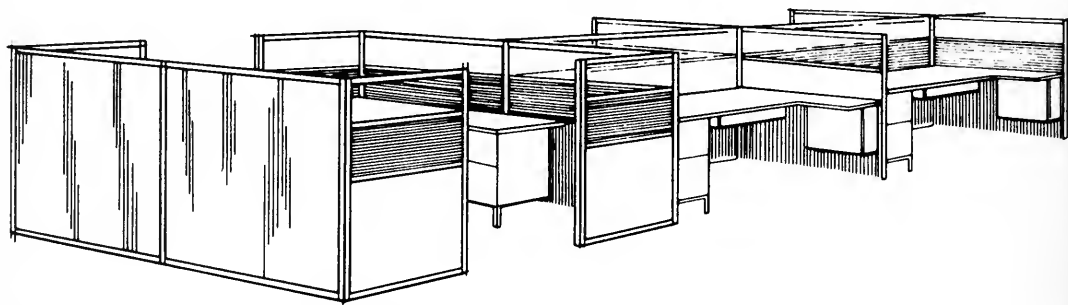
People are increasingly distrustful of and unwilling to commit themselves to organizations that do not make popular activity the center of their attention.

We emphasize that workers must rely on their own mutual efforts, rather than putting blind faith in a collective bargaining contract. Contracts can have the effect of trading away workers' ability to influence their jobs, thus putting an arbitrary ceiling on their aspirations.

## TAKING CONTROL IN A CABLE JUNGLE



*Elevated workstations for supervisors allow eye-to-eye contact with operators.*



*The workstations on the floor level are topped with a glass divider to afford supervisory control.*

Persuading people that their well-being can be guaranteed by one or another politician discourages them from taking charge of their own lives. We see little change in people's lives when a politician who "really has the people's interests at heart" replaces another, leaving the people themselves powerless.

We recognize that social service workers as a lone force will not solve their ultimate problems. In order to develop the strength required for ultimate solutions, we believe in cooperating, in whatever way deemed acceptable by our membership, with all groups of people in the community who have developed popular organizations in their own areas.

We believe our emancipation is possible only by people controlling the conditions under which they work and determining the work they do. We have tried to organize our union so as to encourage and support each member in his efforts to accomplish this. Organization should help people develop self-confidence in confronting management, gaining dignity in their work, and changing their jobs to their own satisfaction.

We are not busy building a mighty edifice to wheel and deal in power politics. We do not buy and sell anything. When we enter into negotiations with administration, we go for as much as we can get, and organize support to get it. We have never agreed to give up anything.

Neither are we simple trade unionists, pursuing only grievances and economic gains for our members. We are defending ourselves. We are taking the offensive; we are going for everything we can get. There is nothing that will satisfy us short of emancipation.

## THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

As U.S. prosperity seemed to be peaking, and the welfare/warfare state assumed its present enormous size and importance in daily life, millions of people organized themselves in active opposition. Rising expectations and desires quickly exceeded what daily reality had to offer. While many focussed their oppositional energies on specific issues, all kinds of people rejected traditional roles and attitudes and attempted to find new ways to live, work, and have fun.

In San Francisco, long a city with a bohemian underground and strong oppositional currents, the "flower children" or hippie subculture bloomed and was made famous by the media-hyped "Summer of Love" in the Haight-Ashbury district in 1967. For many people "dropping out" of the "establishment" meant a rejection of regular work. Still faced with the inflexible demands of a money economy, however, these "dropouts" often turned to the welfare system for survival. As counterculturists came into regular contact with the social workers of the welfare bureaucracy, the two groups began sharing ideas and perspectives.

Very soon, most welfare workers stopped seeing themselves as representatives of the state and the welfare system. Instead, they counseled welfare recipients on how to best take advantage of "the system." But more importantly, they spoke out for themselves, as workers trying to be creative in their work, and helpful to people in need. They went along with the widely-held notion within the SSEU that it was part of a broader movement for fundamental social change.

Curiously, though, this notion does not seem to have prompted the SSEU to a critique of the welfare system *as such*. There is little or no mention in

its publications of the role of the welfare system in controlling the poor, nor much reference to the welfare workers' own role in maintaining this control. SSEU members challenged specific injustices both in their own condition as workers and in the allocation of benefits to recipients. But they seldom explicitly condemned the social relationships that make welfare necessary. Perhaps the feelings of self-acceptance and satisfaction gained from helping people get benefits largely blinded most SSEUers to the longer-term implications of their work.

## THE DIALOGUE

Basing its activities and tactics on the needs and desires of individual workers, the SSEU developed a strategy of non-violent, incessant pressure on the welfare hierarchy. The union eschewed individual acts of insubordination since these usually resulted in firings. Instead they evolved a dialogue/confrontation process, whereby workers would pursue grievances over nearly anything that concerned them via direct spoken or written communication with the pertinent administrators.



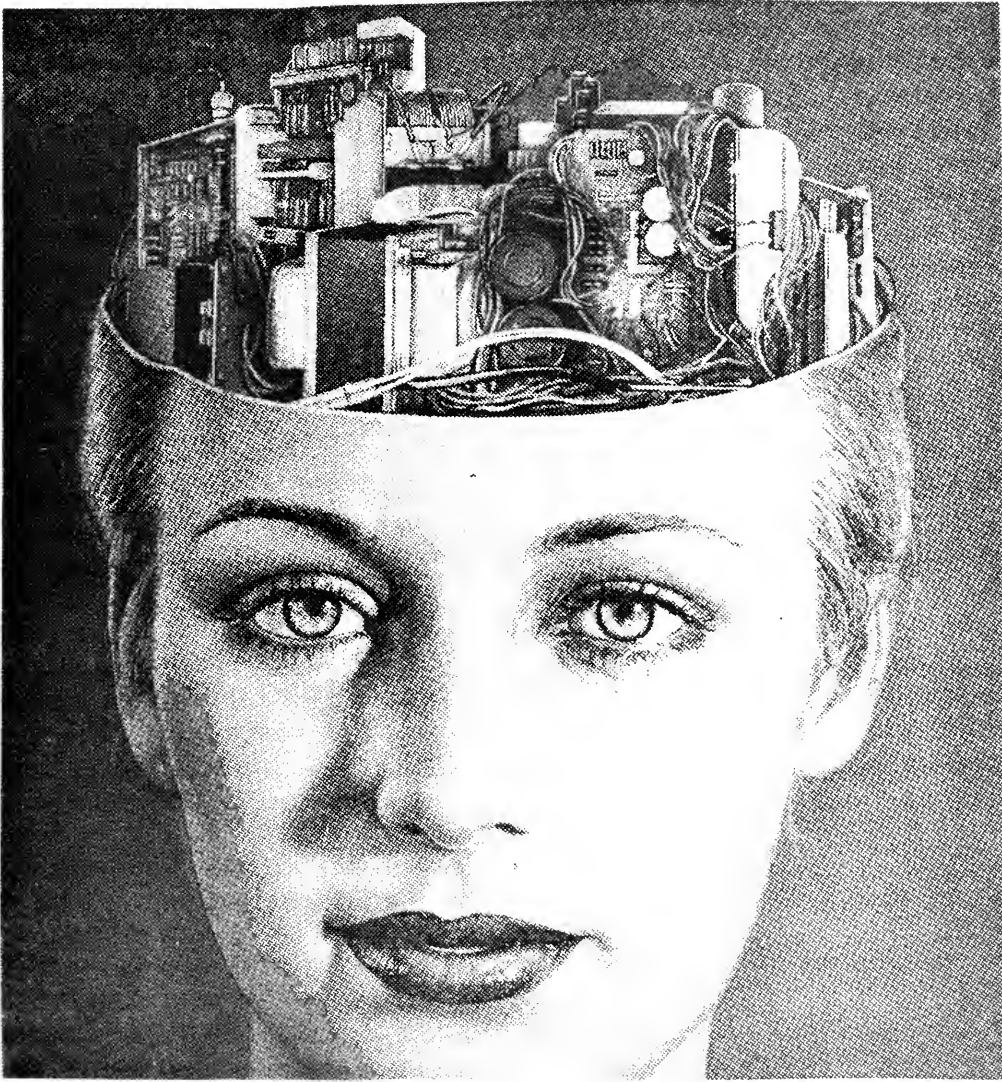
HOWARD DEWITT AND NORMA JOHNSON  
Their dismissals brought the protest

“The strategy of dialogue is profoundly different from the approach employed by a hired representative. Lawyers, politicians, professional negotiators, paid union representatives seem to exclude the grievant so far as possible from the crucial events that occur in the pursuit of his or her grievance. They have a vested interest in creating and maintaining a mystique that only they as professional representatives are capable of understanding. Then, too, the active displeasure of the grievant generates a problem in management control. Administration and professional representatives have a common interest in settling the grievance in such a way that there is no fundamental change in the material relations between administration and the grievant. Whatever is done, is done **for** the grievant, or **to** the grievant, but, so far as they can contrive it, never **by** the grievant. The grievant’s job is to work and theirs is to decide.”

—**ORGANIZING: The Art of Self-Defense In Middle-Class Occupations** by Burt Alpert (1974; Vocations For Social Change; Oakland, CA)



*Doggie Diner*



## “Humanized Interface? Yes, I’m All For It!”

The pressure from below created by the dialogue strategy often led to administrative hearings with managers, commissions, city boards of supervisors, etc. The SSEU demanded and won rights for employees to appear before such hearings to defend their own interests. They also won the right to introduce any evidence or call any witnesses that they felt would support their case.

Although they pursued numerous legal avenues of protest, the SSEU never relied on paid officials to represent the workers involved. Their efforts in the arena of commission

hearings and similar settings were devoted to allowing people to speak for themselves. And while they would do their best to get as much as possible from the authorities in any given situation, they never signed away any rights (such as the right to strike or to take any other actions to help themselves), nor did they ever agree to stop trying to gain further concessions from management.

The following is excerpted from “The Labor Contract: Nugget or Noose?”, a leaflet put out by Burt Alpert of the SSEU during the 1968 fight over contract bargaining:

There are two basic methods of collective bargaining. Both result in written guarantees: the one, a **directive** by management; the other a **contract** (or "agreement") between management and workers.

**THE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING DIRECTIVE:** This is the direct result of grievance action. Workers with a specific grievance, or group of grievances — whether in a unit, building or entire department, organize a protest. The protest may take the form of submitting petitions, balking at doing certain work, forcing management into conferences, work stoppages, slowdowns, or going on strike.

As a result of the protests, administration negotiates with the employees, or with a committee chosen by them, and issues a directive or bulletin establishing improvements.

On their part, the workers agree to nothing: Administration has published the bulletin, not they. For the moment they may accept what is granted in the bulletin — but they are free to renew their protests, in the same or other forms, and to renegotiate **at any time**. Out of this there grows a continuous strengthening of employees' bargaining position and an expansion of their control of the job.

[Through this method] workers gained rights... which... were recognized by administration in a departmental bulletin that has the force of law.

**THE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING CONTRACT:** In this type of collective bargaining, employees present a list of demands to administration. If the demands are not met, a strike vote is held. As a result of the strike vote, or if a strike occurs, a negotiating committee meets with administration and comes to a tentative agreement. If this meets with the strikers' approval, a contract is signed for a stipulated time (one/four years). The workers return to work. The process is renewed at the end of the contract.

A contract being an agreement, each side gives something. The first thing that the workers give is the guarantee that they will not take any strike — or **other** action during the life of the contract.

If there is a violation of the contract, the matter, as almost universally agreed to in contracts, is handed over to a **compulsory** or **binding** arbitrator. In most instances, the "arbitrator" rules in favor of the administration — that there has not been a violation (or the violation is "beyond the control of" the administration), and that is the end of the matter.

The only way in which this can be overturned is through grievance action on the part of the workers. They are forced to do what they could have done previously without the contract, but in doing it now they must oppose not only administration, but also The Contract, and — the union.

... The collective bargaining **contract** may appear attractive, particularly to workers who are not inclined to be active, because in One Big Strike it promises to settle everything (not given away to management) for good — that is, for a year. The dismal failure of one public employees' strike after another that has had a labor contract as its aim, indicates that this is an impossibility.





## BEFORE WE GO OUT...

1. Why isn't the legal staff of the AFL-CIO Service Employees International Union fighting the proposed termination of cumulative sick leave and Election Day holidays through the Courts? In 1970 after the last city strike, Mayor Alioto admitted that the proposed deletion of Civil Service increments, which spun many workers into the picket lines, was not legally tenable as shown by a court decision in Nevada in 1943.
2. If all city workers are asked to honor the picket lines, why can't all city workers vote on striking?
3. Is a person not a member of a striking union, who decides to come to work a scab?
4. If someone walks through the line, will there be violence, or will the right of individual choice be respected?
5. Will all aspects of negotiation between the AFL-CIO and City Management be made public?
6. The Board of Supervisors is presently asking each City department to cut back on personnel by 10%. It is stated by you that the City would be losing "potential qualified employees". Are such employees of temporary status, or are they those who would be potentially hireable? How would such a strike prevent layoffs or hiring?
7. Does SEIU have a strike fund? If so, would this fund be available to all who went out on strike?
8. How can SEIU expect non-members of SEIU unions to honor or support their strike when they supported and pushed through an ordinance which would not have joint collective bargaining? As the Employee Relations Ordinance stands, where SEIU will have exclusive bargaining rights, non-SEIU unions and independent individuals will have their rights of representation curtailed and will not be able to negotiate their working conditions or standards of living. Should workers adversely affected by such an Ordinance be expected to support those who actively supported it?
9. Will the Municipal Railway go out in support this year? When they did not work in the 1970 strike, they lost four days' pay.

These questions have been posted to the SEIU Joint Council with invitation for comments. Responses will be printed in THE RAG TIMES. Herb Weiner, x5934

## STRIKE...WHAT STRIKE?

Last Tuesday morning my supervisor stopped by my desk.

"Do you plan to work during the strike?"

"What strike?"

"Local 400 is striking because the Civil Service Commission wants to take back Election Day as a paid holiday."

"If I work will I get time-and-a-half?"

"No, but if you don't work you won't get paid at all."

"What if I get sick...for real?"

"You can't get sick when there's a strike."

Oh.

Local 96 (AFSCME) has been reminding me for many weeks, with Kentucky Fried Chicken, ballpoint pens, and balloons, that Collective Bargaining Unit elections are going to have to take place sooner or later, and they'd really like me to vote for them. The AFL-CIO hasn't fed me or ballooned me, but it looks like they do intend to give me something to remember them by: either time off the job without pay, or the experience of crossing a picket line for the first time in my life.

Of course, they do have a good issue: if we don't get election day off, we may not bother to go out and vote their boy Joe into the Governor's Mansion. However, with the money the city saves from strikers' salaries, they'll be able to give us election day off, and we will gratefully give both Joe and the AFL-CIO our vote at their respective polls.

"Your name is on the list."

"What list?"

"The list of people who'll be allowed to cross the picket line."

"Who's allowing me to cross the picket line? Who gets that list?"

"Oh, I don't know. The Administration, I guess."

Oh.

Rachel Heyman  
Eligibility Worker  
SFGH

## THE GRINDSTONE

If your nose is close to the grindstone rough,  
And you keep it there long enough,  
In time you'll think there is no such thing  
As brooks that babble and birds that sing.

These three will all your world compose---  
Just you, the stone, and your silly old nose.

Submitted by Ferdinand Fabian

Fundamental to the success of the SSEU's strategy was the *publicity* they created to keep each other, and any interested outsiders, informed about the situation. The monthly newspaper *Dialog* served as an open forum for the exchange of ideas and information. During most of its existence (1966-74?) its policy was to print everything any welfare worker sent in, completely unedited. Later (around 1971) *The Rag Times*, a weekly 8-page mimeographed news-and-opinion sheet, was created by workers in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) section. *Dialog* continued to appear concurrently until they both gradually died out around 1974.

For almost five years, a mimeographed leaflet appeared nearly every morning on every desk though five or more welfare office buildings. These leaflets were created by over a hundred different workers, both members and non-members of SSEU, and addressed a wide range of subjects. Individuals would make their grievances known to co-workers and the administration in leaflet form, demand action from management, and then follow up by publicizing the

results, or lack of them, in a new leaflet.

This technique puts management in a difficult position. Any heavy-handed reactions will only further the anger and independence of the workers. On the other hand, if they just give in to the demands of the aggrieved worker, other workers will be encouraged to present their grievances and expect immediate results. Exposed in this way, authority loses either way.

### *DIRECT ACTION*

Equally vital to the SSEU's success was their willingness to take immediate collective action to confront problems. One time, fifty welfare workers left work in mid-morning and went to a Civil Service Commission hearing. All were reprimanded for leaving work, but they were given the right to send five representatives to future Commission hearings.

The SSEU put a lot of energy into public hearings, because of their confidence in public dialogue/pressure as a means of effecting change. Even though participation in such



Demonstration of welfare workers organized through SSEU outside the main San Francisco welfare office.

hearings seldom brings any significant results, the gaining of representation did signify an assertion of independence and self-organization by the SSEU workers.

In another instance of direct action in late summer 1968, twenty-one workers went to the Dept. of Social Services administrative offices to discuss impending layoffs. Although they received 5-10 day suspensions for sitting in the administrative offices for four hours, the layoffs were rescinded.

Some months later, sixty workers participated in a symbolic "case-dumping" in the office of the division's Assistant Director after a big increase in their workload. Their willingness to do things like this in relatively large groups gave them leverage against intimidated administrators. It also made administrators reluctant to challenge them through speedups and other forms of harassment.

### *UNION AND PARTY ATTEMPTS TO TAKE OVER*

The SSEU didn't find the welfare administration to be its only enemy. In early 1968, the same Local 400 of SEIU which had earlier expelled the welfare section dispatched a paid organizer to recruit members. At that time, the SSEU was growing rapidly, making the administration uneasy. Although the Local 400 organizer didn't have much success with the workers in the Dept. of Social Services, he did manage to recruit some members in other areas of the welfare bureaucracy.

Also in early 1968, the Progressive Labor Party (PLP), a maoist "vanguard party," dispatched a small group to the welfare department to recruit followers. By being very active and taking responsibility for the newspaper, the PLPers managed to get editorial control over the workers'

*Dialog*, and in short order began printing a barrage of pro-"collective bargaining" articles and opinions (i.e. in favor of affiliating with AFL-CIO, signing a contract with the administration, censoring the newspaper, etc.). And, as is always the case with Leninists, the PLP prevented the publication of any ideas that didn't fit their mold of "political correctness."

During the summer of 1968, a bitter fight erupted between most of the SSEU-affiliated workers and an odd coalition of SEIU trade unionists, various Marxist-Leninist parties (PLP, Socialist Workers, Communists, etc.), and Democratic/Republican party hacks. The "coalition" was in favor of joining the AFL-CIO, engaging in collective bargaining as an exclusive bargaining agent, signing a contract with the administration, and eliminating the free flow of ideas by "editing" the newspaper. After several months, which took their toll on the strength and active membership of SSEU, a September 1968 vote of the general membership repudiated the goals of the coalition by better than a 2-to-1 margin. Soon thereafter the PLP and its coalition partners left the department and went to look for other places to "organize."

In the early 70's, the Service Employees International Union created a "national local" (#535) for federally-employed welfare workers. After some initial success at unionization in the Los Angeles area for Local 535, SF's Local 400 gladly turned its jurisdiction over welfare workers to it. Local 535 recruited some welfare workers in San Francisco, and soon began a strategy to "build the union": a yearly ritual strike, used by Local 535 as a way to gain members and to establish exclusive bargaining rights for itself.

SSEU members, now a dwindling minority in the welfare bureaucracy, found themselves in the awkward position of being against these strikes:

## **NO STRIKE — TAKE IT OVER!**

from **The Rag Times**, Vol. 1, No. 5, March 4-10, 1974

The yearly morality problem is upon us again. In making a decision not to strike one hopes not to lose friends who feel strongly that to strike is the best tactic to improve conditions. Again I plan not to strike yet I believe in fighting the same injustices as those who plan to strike.

I feel the yearly SEIU strike is programmed by union leaders who currently are battling each other for membership in order to establish more power when collective bargaining units are created. Strike in the past ten years has replaced real organizing and become a method to recruit members. The pattern is: Condense and exert all energy a month or two before salary raises. City Hall anticipates the strike action and so makes their bid impossibly low. Union leaders then respond angrily and have a platform for the media and can speak with outraged moral conviction. They who risk nothing set up and control the proceedings from beginning to end. Finally the strike — which may produce an additional one or two percent. Little precaution, if any, is taken for people involved because it is “scheduled” to last only a few days. The possibility it could go on indefinitely is hardly considered...

...I feel the SEIU strike, a strike planned and negotiated by union leaders is not progressive, but the opposite. It slows down progress. Traditional unions work for conformism, for a mass undifferentiated way of acting, or for precisely what we are ordered to do every day for the city and county of San Francisco. It substitutes for real organizing year after year.

I feel strongly there are no short-cuts to freedom of a just salary. The amount of organizing done by every person every day and the trust created by working things out together is the process to win a real increase in salary. With enough worker activity, strikes would be an obsolete tactic. The mayor and supervisors are comfortable dealing with union representatives. They fear meeting with workers themselves. They can deal with fellow-bureaucrats. They are afraid of the spontaneity of individual workers when they are organized. Rather than remain outside as in a strike, I feel it would be more effective to control the machinery inside, not abandon it to the administrators.

Finally, I feel by striking I would reinforce a process which means I could retire in 20 years after 20 strikes and be assured 20 miniscule raises. But by working for change without controllers, I have hope the administrators will one day meet such opposition as transcends even my liveliest imagination.

—Judy Erickson, aided by Gayle Abbott

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**NATCO**  
Making America Work  
For US Again.

## *DISSOLUTION AND RETROSPECTION*

The SSEU slowly dissolved in the 1970's, like other small independent unions that grew out of the rebellious 60's. The last official SSEU meeting was in 1976. By some accounts the dissolution process began as early as 1970, although different workers still pay dues to this day, and publication continued until 1975.

The SSEU aspired to be part of a general social movement for emancipation; emancipation not just from the real and rhetorical shackles of capitalism, but also from the countless

ways we have internalized our oppression and learned to accept our role in a world based on hierarchy and domination.

During its existence, the SSEU brought about a remarkable unfolding of different workers' creative energies. What's more, as Burt Alpert remembers it, the experience of actively challenging the limitations imposed by the daily grind "brought people out into the world," asserting their uniqueness and desires. Rather than seeking a "unity" of thought and purpose, the SSEU encouraged the widest possible diversity, and in fact such a diversity flowered at the time.



Air-Conditioned Nightmare

The dialogue/confrontation tactic went a long way toward unmasking authority as illegitimate and unreasonable. More importantly, it strengthened people's confidence in their own ideas and in their ability to do things for themselves. Using a simple typewriter and mimeograph, the SSEU participants offered themselves and their co-workers the possibility of putting his/her ideas out into the public realm, further empowering the individuals involved.

Moreover, the fact that workers were in constant, open contact with each other about a wide variety of subjects, including working conditions and problems they faced collectively, put an enormous amount of pressure on management. After all, if workers were figuring out their problems for themselves, what did they need administrators for?

But this strategy also put pressure on the workers themselves: to keep the channels of communication open; to figure out how to deal with disagreements on tactics, strategies, etc.; to keep the heat on management and figure out new ways to subvert management control...the energy to keep all this going came from around 200 individuals.

Their energy, in turn, came largely from the perception that something bigger was going on, a social movement of which they were but a small part. By challenging the oppressive conditions of everyday life, SSEU participants felt that their actions, in concert with others, would lead to a more generalized transformation of society. Keeping up the energy became increasingly difficult. Today, many ex-SSEUers are (understandably) burned out.

Actually, this remains one of the key dilemmas faced by those of us who aspire to participate in a rebellion for a free society: How can we challenge the immediate conditions we face, and at the same time contribute to a more generalized oppositional move-

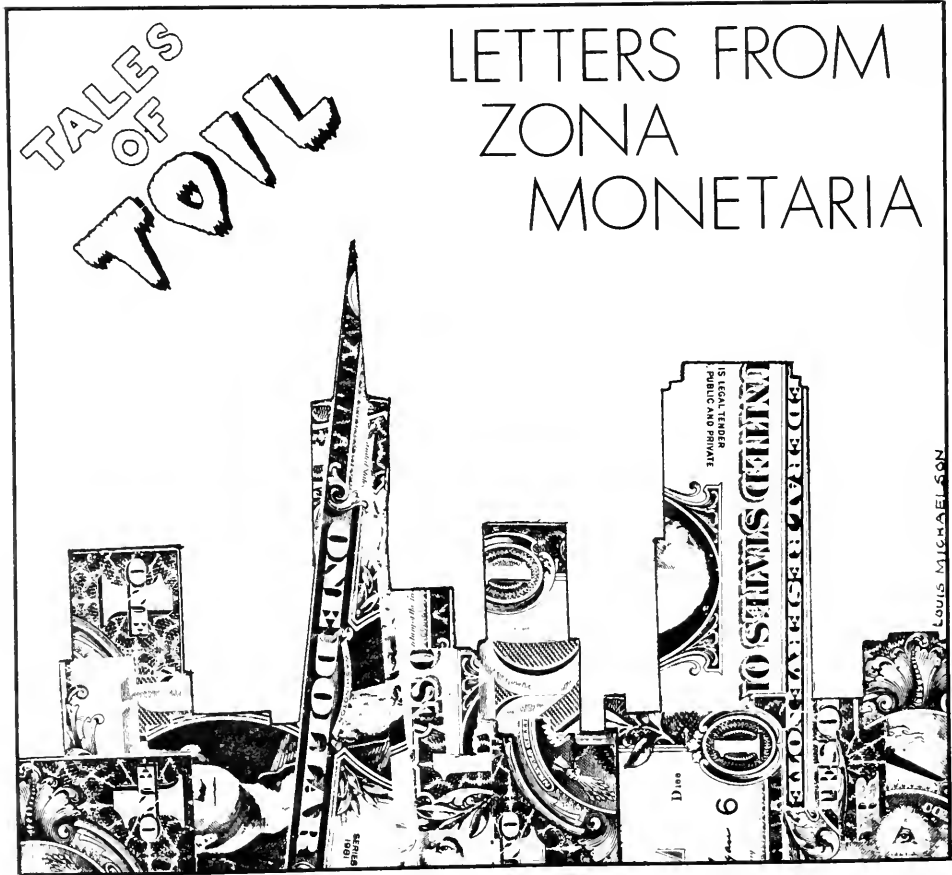
ment? What are the connections between workplace organizing and resistance, and the larger problems of world capitalism and authoritarian domination? Also, how can groups of people organize themselves in their own interest, hang together and last, without turning into new institutions of power and control?

The SSEU pioneered a unique approach to organizing in the office. It was based, however, on the special conditions of welfare work. Most important among these was the workers' perception of their jobs as having some socially useful quality — however ambiguous this quality may seem in retrospect.

This is in marked distinction to office work in CorporateOfficeLand where the work has no relation whatsoever to the direct satisfaction of human needs and few pretend that it does. The vast majority of office work done in San Francisco or any other financial center has to do with circulating money or wealth-related information around. It is difficult to imagine why anyone would *want* to have more direct control over essentially useless work, except perhaps to put an end to it.

Nevertheless, contemporary office workers can learn a lot from the SSEU experience in terms of strategy, possibilities for creative resistance, and obstacles that will be encountered in any organizing effort. The importance of the individual and his/her desires and needs can be seen in the SSEU story as the central concern of organizing. A new movement for social liberation will not be created by existing (or new) bureaucracies or organizational imperatives. It will have to be based on the creativity, humor, and resourcefulness of freely cooperating individuals. But first we must contact each other. Isolation is our greatest problem now.

BY LUCIUS CABINS



By J. Gulesian — Temporary-at-Large

Thanks for *PW* 3, which came wrapped in plastic, mangled by the Postal Service machinery. It was good to hold something made by unalienated labor.

It was also good to contrast working class fantasies with management ones. Have you seen the TV commercial for *Fortune*? Now, *that's* fantasy — swordplay and castration (symbolic, nearly subliminal) in the board rooms of America.

The latest on the management-workers war is that the Reagan administration won't prosecute affirmative action even though discrimination against minorities and others is still illegal. *Kiplinger's "Newsletter"* reported this in its very last issue of 1981 with a special reminder to

note it carefully.

I spend a lot of my unbound time reading about work. Are you familiar with *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, (Sennett & Cobb, Vintage, 1973) or *Breaktime* (Lefkowitz, Hawthorne, 1979)? Both are good reference sources about *attitudes* towards work. I'm still trying to understand why I can't look for a permanent job and how I can live without one. Am I in the front or the rear of a social movement, and does it matter? Is the game life, or is life the game?

The management trainees here decorate their cubicles with all kinds of anti-management paper. Nothing strange about that except that the manager has noticed and commented in a memo. "Directories, 'to-do' lists



and cartoons are wallpapered on every vertical staff surface. I find it painful to sign the monthly rent check for this building when I see what our working quarters look like. Since we all spend so many of our waking hours in this building, wouldn't it make sense to take a few minutes to make the overall appearance a little more attractive?" It's now two months later and the look of the vertical staff surfaces hasn't changed. One example in my line of vision: a Xeroxed cartoon with 2-inch lettering reading "They can't fire me! Slaves have to be sold!" Actually, slaves don't have to be sold; they can be discarded. The welfare lines are full of them. This morning these vertical staff surface paperers were showing off the afterwork clothes they'd wear to a punk rock concert. The most conserv-

ative had the most *outré* costume, which he claimed was absolutely unique — a pair of chef's pants.

Fashion fascism is the rule here. There's certainly no punk style from 8:30-5. The women in management are dressing for success; secretaries wear pants and success knock-offs; plantation workers labor in polyester. My fantasy today is that there are giant petri dishes on the 39th floor cloning thousands more of these workers. Will the new ones take better care of their vertical staff surfaces?

\* \* \* \* \*

Call me Mister Kurtz.

Although this job is full of the usual disadvantages, it does offer the chance to expropriate from the expropriators in a modest way. Whether or

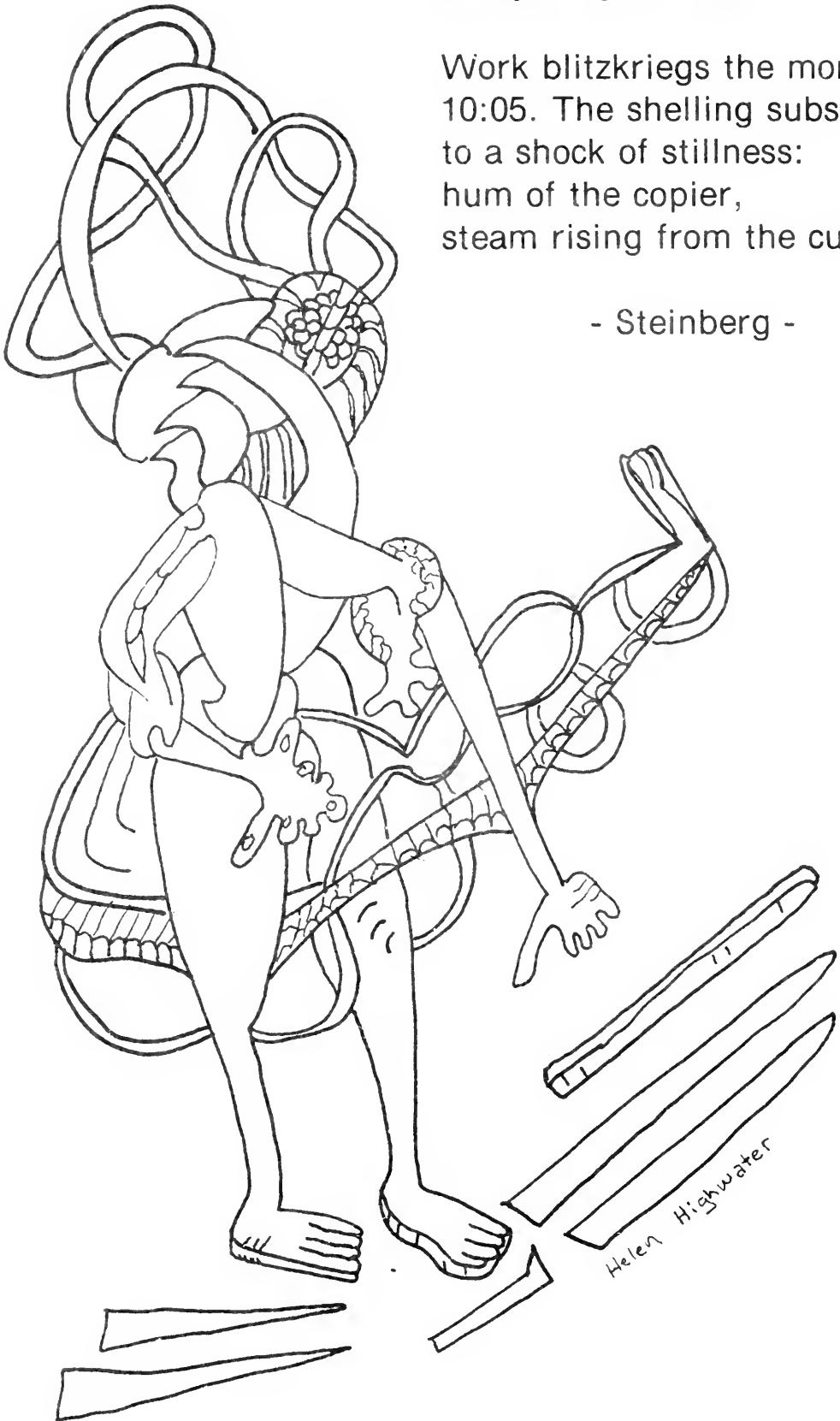


“I've worked so hard to get to where I am today. And yet... I feel so empty.”

## Temporary Clerical

Work blitzkriegs the morning.  
10:05. The shelling subsides  
to a shock of stillness:  
hum of the copier,  
steam rising from the cup.

- Steinberg -



not I can actually become involved in pushing the advantages of carcinogens in drinking water is a real challenge.

Interesting conversation now about conditions at the PG&E building — workers complaining about airborne particles and “dust” on office windows, dry eyes making wearing contact lenses uncomfortable, etc., etc. Management maintains the vents have been “turned off.” Messenger expresses reluctance to return to PG&E, even though he’s been told his “nervous condition” is responsible for his fears. What’s going on here?

This place sells soft drinks to the Third World (it’s a source of sterile water, I hear) and lots of other stuff

like candy bars and carcinogens. I think you can understand my struggle with ethics. Is this an alternative to being a vent person (def.: derelict who finds a place on the sidewalk near or on an exhaust vent, esp. in winter)? Because that’s how it looks to me. If I’m too squeamish or exquisite to swallow the corporate dose of cynicism, then what’s left for me — the sheltering arms of the streets. But I digress, and there are miles of multiple copies before I sleep.

\*\*\*\*\*

Peasants of the global village unite!  
You have everything to lose if you lose  
cont’d. on page 36

Levi Strauss & Co Two Embarcadero Center San Francisco California 94106 Phone 415 544-6000



SPECIAL TRAINING MEMO

FROM: The Management  
TO: All Employees  
DATE: March 10, 1982  
SUBJECT: SPECIAL HIGH INTENSITY TRAINING PROGRAM

In order to assure that we retain technological leadership in the industry, it is our policy to keep all employees well trained. Through our Special High Intensity Training (S.H.I.T.) program, we are giving our employees more S.H.I.T. than any other company in the Bay Area.

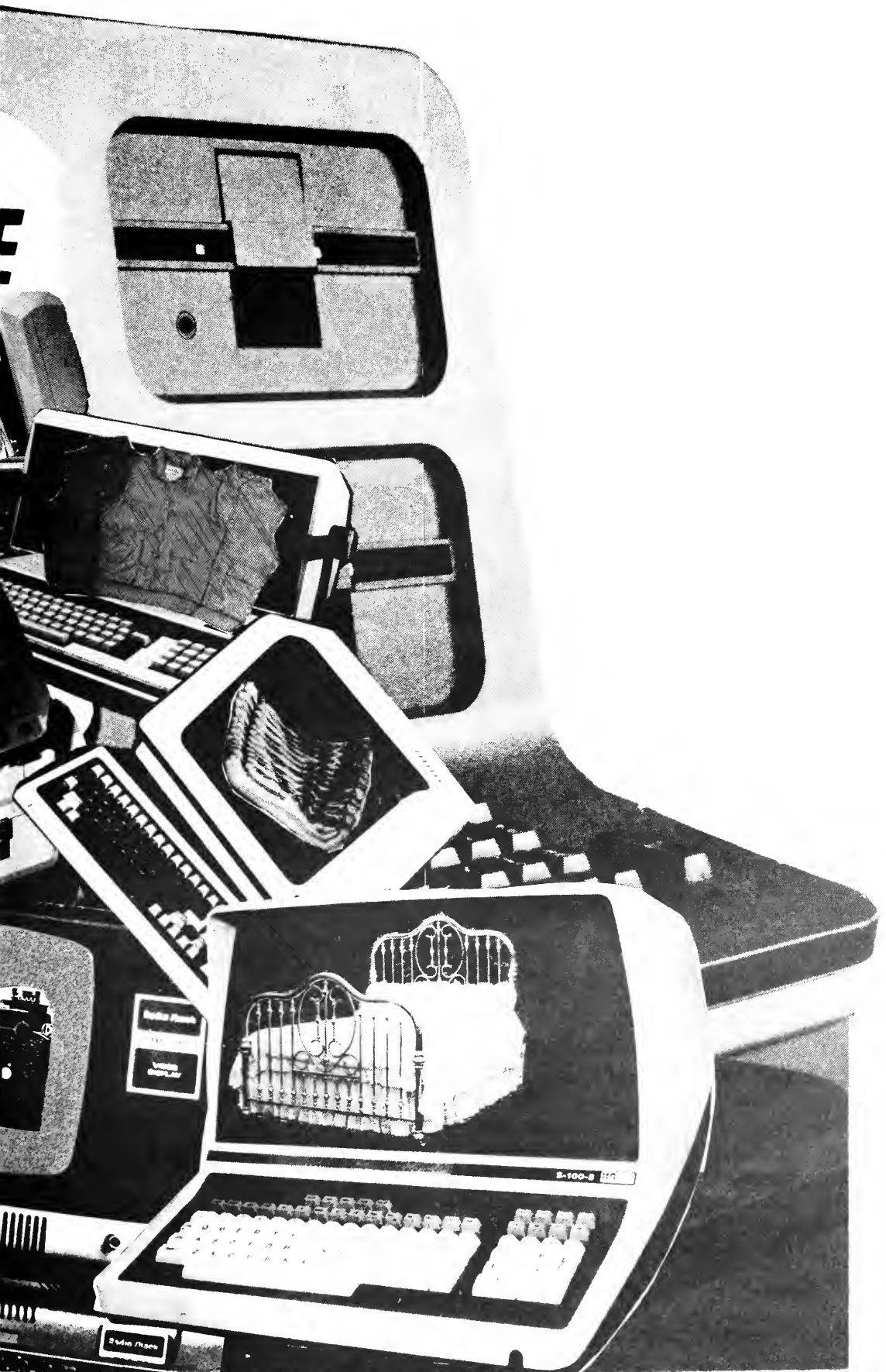
If you feel you do not receive your share of S.H.I.T. on the job, please see your supervisor or manager. You will be placed at the top of the S.H.I.T. list for special attention. All of our Department Heads, Managers, Supervisors, etc., are particularly qualified to see that you get all of the S.H.I.T. you can handle at your own speed.

If you have any further questions, please contact the Head of Training, Special High Intensity Training (H.O.T.S.H.I.T.).

NorthStar **ADVANTAGE**

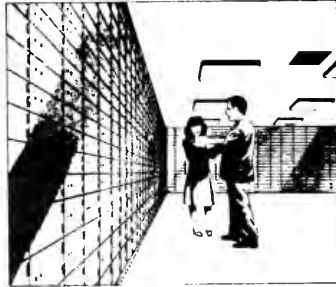
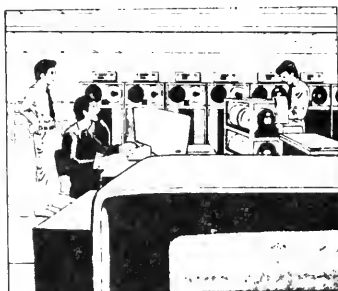
# S'ELL YOUR TIME TO BUY THE TIME THAT OTHER PEOPLE S'OLD







We'd like to show you how it's done.



Yes, we'd like to show you how millions of hours of human life are taken up by the endless movement of useless information. Whether it's data center workers, file clerks, keypunch operators, or those employed in the construction and maintenance of office buildings, they are all "making a living" doing things that have no relationship to human well-being. If you would like to experience this emptiness first hand, just get a job in any Financial District.

your senses. Break the hypnotic trance induced by hours of office drudgery. Look, listen, touch, taste, and smell. Thinking naturally follows. Start with something simple.

For instance, buttons and button-holes. Ever noticed that the more buttons on someone's clothes, the more power and influence, and the less socially useful the wearer? The six-button vest, three-button suit coat, six- or eight-button coat cuffs,

button-down shirt collar equal a real heavyweight in the *zona monetaria*. Less obvious and much less frequent are the button fly of the \$1200+ custom-made suit and the two-button shorts (underwear).

In the fashion fascism game the scoring goes something like this: no points for zippered polyester jump suits (or aberrations like snap fasteners posing as buttons — a real button means a button hole or close approx-

imation, preferably hand sewn); good points to old-style international diplomats, mostly for double-breasted coats and European handtailoring; good points, too, to high-ranking Mafia members; winning score for vestments, especially the Pope's (note number of buttons on chasuble, everything hand sewn in gold or silk thread — the tops).

Question: If (against all odds) computer work stations do increase managerial productivity, will costume reflect this change in efficiency? The five-button vest is becoming more commonplace, probably due to cost-cutting by clothing manufacturers. However, the longstanding tradition of leaving the bottom buttonhole open is disappearing. Brooks Brothers still sells only six-button vests. Any other questions?

And more.

The attack on the national language has not been accompanied by demands for the right to wear native costume. In fact this costume is swiftly abandoned as the push for bilingualism accelerates. The clothing adopted — double-knit pants, designer-branded knock-offs and plastic shoes — is that of the only socially useful class. Most striking is the unisexual character of this costume. Those of middle age in the American working class expressed the most outrage at the cross-sexual dressing of the hippies. However, this group is the only one that made the firm commitment to pastel double-knit leisure suits in the seventies and is now slouching towards five-button vests. Former and crypto-hippies have embraced the three-piece suit, Louis Vuitton, and dressing for success.

Which is impossible unless you're a hooker with an esoteric speciality. Vuitton and Jordache, like sex, are the great equalizers. Designer-initialized clothes do attract attention, but probably from muggers. How often is

a secretary rewarded with envious looks of her inferiors or the approving ones of her superiors *just* because she wears Calvin Klein? And how important is a \$90,000 sable coat if you can't have one in every color?

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At a conference of the Computer and Business Equipment Manufacturers Association last fall, Xerox President David Kearns expressed impatience that after five years, "some of you are still wrestling with the question of whether a word processor is a typewriter or a computer." He dismisses this titanic struggle with the following: "I don't think it's an important question. It gets in the way of what really is important, which is that these machines increase productivity dramatically." No wonder there's concern with declining productivity if five years is spent on such questions. Of course, Mr. Kearns isn't disinterested. Besides throwing kisses at the icon of productivity he's also a shill for the Xerox 8010, a "personal information" system aimed at the business professional. The target's "behavioral problems" just go with the territory. The territory in this case is the market share an army of Willie Lomans is trying to capture.

*Nation's Business* examines the imminent evolutionary technology in a special report (February 1982). The tone of this report is full of a peculiar attitude, a blend of single focus, inevitability, and unanswered questions common to such publications. Reading it I wondered if its subscribers might already be so tribalized that they practice voodoo or ritual sacrifice. A believer in santeria probably invokes the name of Chango less often than his free enterprise counterpart calls up the word productivity.

The effect of this attitude is a hard sell behind a smile and a handshake.

Managers, professionals, and executives in this instance are interchangeable terms. However, vendors using their own definitions divide the market into four parts: "clericals, who work with numbers; secretaries, who work with words; professionals, who work with ideas; and executives." Now we know what executives do.

To help them do it better vendors are using the print medium in full-color and a catchy slogan, something about "just pushing a button." A similar slogan was aimed at women during the 1950s. Then the vendors were manufacturers of washing machines, vacuum cleaners, air conditioners and other plug-in servants. Curiously, the most resistance to pushing buttons came from Southern women who maintained that if any finger pushed a button it would be a black finger. Executives do push buttons to summon secretaries and subordinates and to practice other forms of harassment. *Nation's Business* believes executive fingers pushing the buttons of the future will mean a redistribution of workloads.

In a particularly crass aside *NB* notes that "clericals who face change have little choice but to comply; managers can resist change — and often do." No examples of resistance were given, but I have no doubt there will be resistance. I am certain, too, that an entire subindustry is poised to spring forth. Led by a media blitz which has already rolled out, this industry will devote itself to the adjustment of managers to the new technology. There will be books and TV shows focused on executive alienation, seminars on technology-related managerial stress, discovery of unknown allergies, digital fatigue, and assorted "needs." The personal computer, once an office companion, will be transformed into a tribble.

But the hateful question "why don't you put it in writing?" won't

disappear. I have sent many such written things straight to the shredder rather than to the *oubliette* of the files. The new technology threatens the form of the document but not the corporate hierarchy. The greatest benefit of executive work stations will be saving time, according to a Booz-Allen & Hamilton study. But what will be the total effect on the corporate structure when executives get the same information simultaneously? A new dimension is introduced into the paper-shuffling ritual. What will disappear first is the fudged answer, "the report is being typed, reproduced, mailed."

In the meantime I am able to remain a member of *la boheme* — the temporary work force. Until the necessary point of view develops that will force managers to push buttons I am the known value in the servility quotient, to bring in the multiple copies one at a time. I tremble at the thought of future chores as a result of redistributed workloads, and I know whose time will be saved and whose will be wasted. When the leaders talk of peace, Brecht wrote, you may be certain your draft notice is already in the mail.

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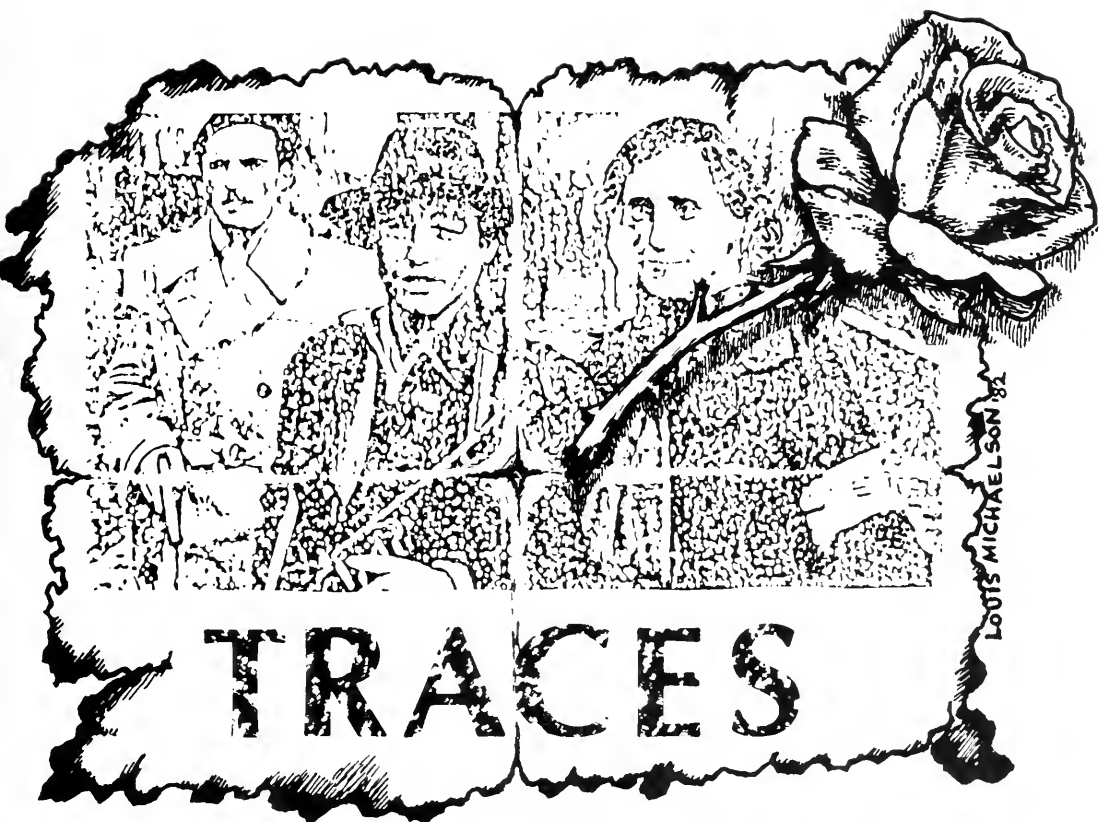
### SPECIAL OFFER

Do you ever feel like saying something to the people at work, but don't know how to go about it? Well the folks at **Processed World** have an offer: we will help anyone who wants to create a leaflet for distribution (anonymously or not) at their workplace. We have typesetting, camera/darkroom, and printing facilities available, as well as sympathetic helpers. If you are interested, drop us a line at:

Processed World  
55 Sutter St. #829  
San Francisco, CA 94104

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The little girl is sitting on her father's shoulders to get a better look at the crowd. She has never seen so many people in one place before. But she feels tired and restless, for night has long since descended on the city. Her mother whispers a few comforting words to her and speaks reproachfully to the father. You should have left the child with Mrs. Farkas, it's way past her bedtime. The father lifts the little girl off his shoulders and hugs her tightly. What, leave her behind on an evening like this, she'll remember it for the rest of her life, Magda, I know she will. The little girl catches sight of a drunk picking his way uncertainly through the crowd. Look Daddy, look at the funny man over there, he's going to fall down. The mother glances disapprovingly at the drunk who is clutching a half-empty bottle of brandy in one hand and a stack of newspapers in the other. Ignore him, darling, and maybe he won't notice us. Oh come now, Magda, he's just celebrating in his own harmless way. The drunk starts shouting at the top of his lungs. October 23, 1956! Remember that

date, comrades! The eyes of all Hungary are on us! His rhetorical flourish brings on a fit of coughing, which he cures by taking a huge swig out of the bottle, much to the little girl's amusement. The drunk waggles his head up and down, rubs his belly, and politely offers his bottle to the father. Thanks a lot, brother, but you need it more than I do. Don't want any, eh? Well, here's to you and your lovely wife and child, the holy family. How about a paper, then? Not to read, of course, you roll it up like this, touch a match to it, and there you have it. He holds aloft the makeshift torch. The fires of truth consume the Party's lies and illuminate the obscurity of the night. Like that? I thought it up myself when I was over in Parliament Square this evening. Now, here I am at the Radio building, searching for more miracles. But you haven't heard the best part, comrades, some of the boys pulled down *his* statue, smashed it to bits, only the boots are left. Barely able to contain his excitement, the father sets the little girl down and fumbles in his pockets for some coins. Such good news is easily worth

another bottle for you, comrade. The mother is smiling in spite of herself. I can't believe it, Ferenc, your dream's come true. The little girl is jubilant as she listens to her mother tell her that the statue she always hated is gone for good. Suddenly, the drunk crouches down and grasps the little girl by the shoulders. The mother moves to pull her child away, but her husband restrains her gently. He means no harm, Magda, don't worry. You stink, Mister. Yes, with good honest brandy. Do I scare you? No, I think you're funny. Well, even though I'm a lousy drunk, I'm here tonight for the same reasons your parents are — to give you a real world to grow up in. Never forget I told you that. He lurches to his feet and drains his bottle in one gulp. Thanks for your kindness comrades. Remember, October 23, 1956! The drunk vanishes into the crowd as the father stares meditatively after him. Once that statue's gone, who knows where it will all end?

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It is now 9:00, and Anna, who sits four desks in front of me, hasn't come in yet. Often, she doesn't show up until 9:15. Today, on the way to the coffee room, I passed by her desk, where her CRT was flashing the indignant message it delivered to latecomers: 102381 STATION 557-85E NOT SIGNED ON 0830. The unit supervisor, Joe Grant, could obtain a complete record of Unit 12's employee attendance for the day simply by touching a few keys on his office terminal. No doubt it would be a matter of minutes before he stormed out of his glass-enclosed cubicle to ask his unresponsive employees where Anna Baron was this morning.

Although I see Anna every day, I don't say much to her, aside from the usual indifferent hi-how're-you-doing's. But she has been in my thoughts ever since I started working

here three weeks ago, when Grant told me, watch out for the good-looking gal four desks in front of you, she's real bad news, morale's gone down since she came aboard in April, I don't want to fire her because I believe in giving people a fair shake, which reminds me, I've got to be honest with you, this place is just the first rung up the ladder for kids like you, I know the work's not the most exciting in the world, but the company depends on people like us, and you'll be sure to get promoted out of here in six months, if you do me favors, I'll do you favors, that's how I am, just cooperate, that's all I ask, not much, is it?

So I can't tell Anna what I feel when I see her trudging to her desk each morning, when at 3:30 each afternoon she jumps up and dances around that desk, when she yells an epithet at the screen after making a mistake in her data entry. She entrances me, but I don't know why. Maybe it's the way she spins her swivel chair around: she holds on to the side of her desk, braces herself, and with a single push of her feet whirls like a dervish, sometimes letting go with a high-pitched whoop. Or maybe it's her habit of shadow-boxing with the cathode ray tube. "Pow, pow, pow," she grunts and pretends to put her clenched fist right through the screen.

Much to my discomfort — and why should I feel that way? — I realize that Anna brings a breeze of life into this stale, windowless, confined office. Even the older workers, who ordinarily would be shocked at her apparent lack of inhibition, seem to take her behavior in stride. Yesterday, a woman named Mattie was complaining of double vision, so Anna walked over to her desk and told her to go to the quiet room for a few minutes and lie down. Mattie was reluctant to do so because she was behind on her input-card quota and she dreaded hearing about it from Grant. "Just rest, Mattie, I'll take



*Budapest, 1956*

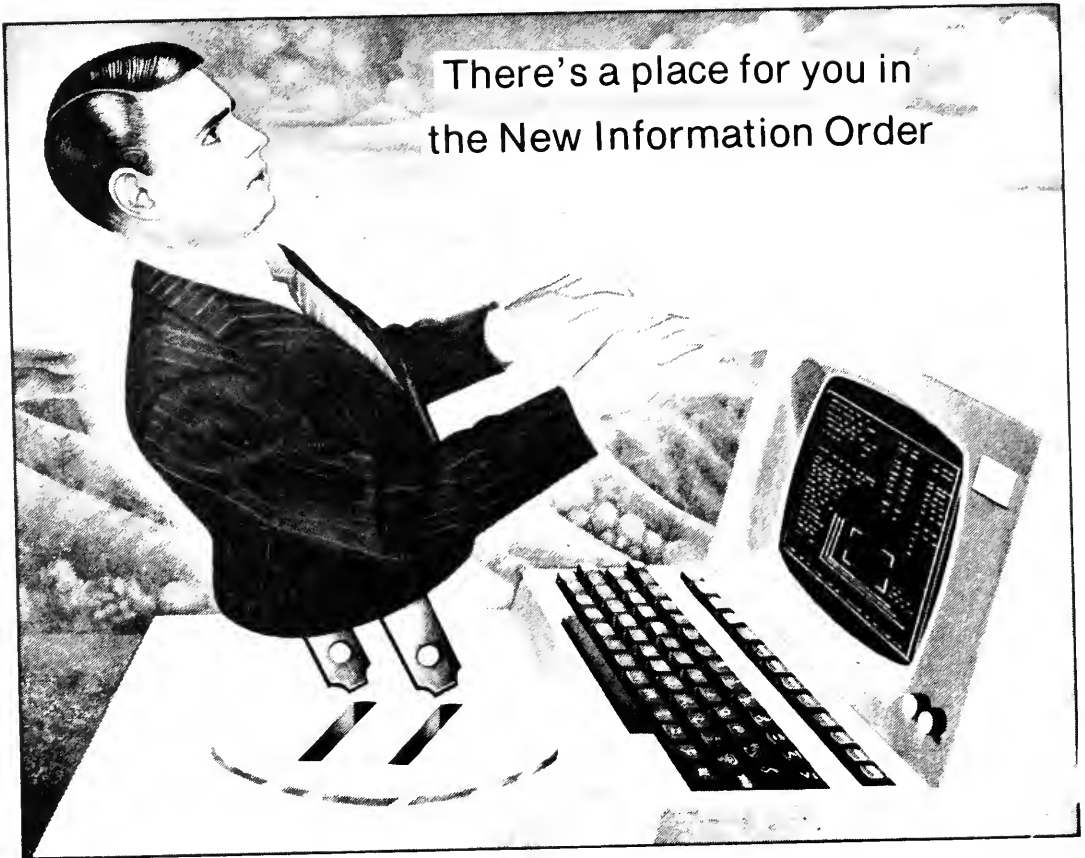
care of it." Then, to everyone's amazement, she sat down and started doing Mattie's work. When Mattie returned after half an hour, Anna asked her how she felt. "Much better now," the older woman murmured. "Good," smiled Anna, "well, you can take it easy the rest of the afternoon, because I just finished your pile." Mattie looked ready to cry after hearing that, but Anna interrupted her broken words of thanks and said, "Hey, don't worry, Mattie, we're all in this together, aren't we?"

I don't think I ever felt more lonely and isolated than at that moment. Anna was right, we were all in it together, but as far as I was concerned, my fellow workers were merely a random assortment of name plates, except for Anna. To me, she seemed to belong to another world entirely, where a single leap of the imagination was enough to bridge the distance between heaven and earth. I tried to dispel the pang in my chest by working faster than usual. When it was time to go home, my surround-

ings shimmered before my eyes as if I had stared too long into the sun; everything had turned into little yellow dots on a green field. I rode the bus home, got off, went upstairs, threw myself on my mattress and closed my eyes to make the dizziness go away, and suddenly, I was asleep.

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As the sounds of the crowd wash over her, the little girl shivers in the night-time cold and nestles closer to her father. The mother is feeling tense, because she dislikes being in situations she cannot control. Ferenc, answer me, what possible good does it do to remain here? We could just as easily go home and listen to the Prime Minister's speech on the radio. There are plenty of radios here already, Magda. But what about those cops over there, they've got guns, if they're provoked, they'll shoot, it's not worth it, let's go home. The father smiles bitterly. Do you honestly think I'm afraid of the cops? I make guns all



There's a place for you in  
the New Information Order

day at the factory, why should it surprise you that the police wind up with them? Go on home if you want, I'm staying here until the delegation gives its report. You'll feel pretty silly when you hear that our demands were granted and you weren't even around to share that moment with us. Ferenc, you're impossible. And you're a coward, Magda, all these years we've talked about getting rid of the thieves and murderers in the government, and now that it's finally happening, you want to run away and hide your head under the covers. The little girl, bored with her parents' quarreling, begins to sing a tune that her mother had taught her a few days before. A few people turn to look at her and clap their hands in encouragement. The father extends his arms towards his wife in a gesture of reconciliation, but she refuses to embrace him. Come on, Magda, at least look at our daughter, she's got the right idea, this is a day for singing, not for arguing. Please stay, dearest, what good is a moment

like this if we can't live through it together? I'm sorry, Ferenc, you're right, I'm just nervous, but I'll get over it. The father puts his arms around his wife and both of them listen proudly to their daughter's song.

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The door behind me opens, and before I know it, Anna has rushed past me to her desk. After removing her coat and draping it over her chair, she stretches herself, glances nervously towards Grant's office, and signs on to the terminal. As if on cue, Joe Grant stamps out to yell at her, but he is brought up short when he sees that Anna is dressed more strikingly than her custom, in a black blouse and black pants, with a rose in her hair. Grant's voice softens into a peculiar unctuous croon. "Well, Anna, you're looking very nice today. What's the occasion?"

Her shoulders stiffen. "Thanks,

nothing special, just felt like changing the image today, you know."

Realizing that his compliment has had no effect on her, Grant changes his attitude and mutters through clenched teeth, "Well, I didn't come out here to discuss fashion, Anna. Could you please come into my office?"

She tries to make a joke out of the situation by running her fingers coquettishly through her hair. "You can't trap me that easily, Mister Grant, I'm an honest woman." Grant blushes, and a ripple of laughter courses through the room at this incongruous sight. "Seriously, Mister Grant, I have nothing to hide. Why don't you say what you have to say right here and now, in front of witnesses?"

Everyone in the office has stopped working and watches in intent expectation of a new topic of lunch-hour conversation. "Look, Anna, I've been telling you for two months straight, either come to work on time or don't come at all. We're running an office here, not a playpen." Infuriated at his condescension, Anna jumps up and walks straight over to him. "Mister Grant," she says with exaggerated politeness, "what counts is that my work's as accurate as it's always been, so with that in mind, I'd appreciate it if you got off my back, 'cause believe me, I've got enough problems without you adding to them."

With that, she turns on her heel and strides angrily out of the office. Grant is standing there open-mouthed, scratching his head. "Okay, get back to work, everybody," he mumbles, "you've had your free entertainment for today."

Before Grant can go back into his cubicle, the man who sits behind me decides to intervene. "Uh, Mister Grant, I know you probably couldn't care less about this, but for the past couple of months, Anna's had to raise her daughter all by herself. She takes

the kid to school every morning and then rides clear across town to get to work. Nobody cares that she gets in late, except you, maybe you should ease up on her."

A woman sitting across the room nods her head in agreement. "Yeah, Mister Grant, Anna's okay, we all like her, you don't help things by yelling at her. Can't you work something out with her? I've got an eight-year-old, I know how difficult it can be."

Grant is astonished at such temerity, the more so as everybody is saying yes, Mister Grant, Eddie's right. His business-like exterior crumbles briefly and he shouts at the man behind me, "You can't fool me, Thornton, I know you and your little friend Anna are trying to stir my people up against me. Don't think I don't know who stuck that leaflet up in the johns a few days ago. Fight unfair work quotas, what a laugh. Well, I got news for all of you. I just got a memo from Davis saying that Unit 12's going to have to increase its productivity by 10%, effective November 1, the monthly stats aren't good enough, So you won't be able to goof off, come in late, or anything, I'm letting you know this ahead of time so you can be prepared."

He slams his cubicle door. It is customary for such outbursts to be followed by the monotonous clacking of keyboards, but this time I hear the buzzing of human voices instead. How do you like that, a real live speed-up. They're crazy, it's all I can do to make my quota every day. All they care about is their goddam input cards. What about Grant, he's really got the rag on today, he oughta get his ass kicked. It's big enough for all of us to kick.

At this last remark, I begin laughing uncontrollably. The voices around me fall silent and someone taps me on the shoulder. It is the man who sits behind me, and since I've never said a word to him before, I wonder what he could possibly want.

"Hey, 'scuse me, man, I couldn't help hearing you laugh. I never heard an Entry do that before, that's strictly an Exit trick. Entries don't laugh, you know, they're too busy working for their brighter tomorrows. Not me, I'm so bad off here I find everything funny. By way, my name's Eddie, how're you doing?" He holds up a name plate to his chest and assumes the scowl of a convicted felon posing for a mug shot. I shake hands with him and tell him my name, and as an afterthought ask him what all of that entry-and-exit business meant.

"It's like this. Grant introduced you the first day you came here. That means he's looking to you to play the game well so you can get a better position in another section. We call people like you Entries, 'cause the company doors are wide open for them. Me, I'm an Exit, nowhere to go but oh-you-tee, onto the pavement, with nothing but a personnel file full of disciplinary memos for them to remember me by. Unit 12 is the bottom of the dungheap, and Grant's the head beetle in it. And you probably know all that, but you'll never say anything. Entries don't like to talk, unless it's to other Entries, and they don't generally like to see anything, unless it's on a CRT."

He has reminded me of the loneliness and misery I felt yesterday afternoon. "You're not being fair, what do you expect, I've only been here three weeks."

"Three weeks, three days, three months — who cares? You got eyes, you got ears, why don't you use them so you don't miss the important things? At least you sure noticed Anna — every time she comes in here, I notice you looking at her funny." Before I can raise my hand in protest, he hurries on. "Look, I don't mean for you to feel stupid about that. Anna's got a way about her that people pick up on. I know how that is, 'cause she's a friend of mine. We're trying to get a duet act together. She

sings, I play the saxophone, and we're getting better every day. You gotta hear us do God Bless the Child, haven't heard anything like it since Lady Day. In all modesty. Hey look, I gotta take care of some of these cards, why don't we talk about this over lunch? Noon sound okay?"

I don't like his arrogant attitude. My first instinct is to decline his invitation, but I am afraid of what he might say if I do. Besides, he could tell me more about Anna. After a minute of hesitation, I nod my head, adding sarcastically, "if your friends won't disown you when they see you having lunch with an Entry."

Out of temper, I swivel my chair around to my desk, where the stack of input cards reminds me that I am much further behind in my work than usual. I remove the top card, check boxes 1 and 2 to make sure they are completely filled in, no abbreviations, reconcile the figures in boxes 3 through 6, and transfer them to the appropriate locations on the screen. Anna has returned and is singing wordlessly to herself, tapping the side of her CRT with a pencil. I wonder whether people can be read like input cards. Lost in thought, I peer into the screen and see my face reflected on the eternal green field.

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The little girl no longer feels tired. Her mother is disturbed at the strange, wild glint in her daughter's eyes. You shouldn't get so excited, honey, it'll make you ill. The crowd's mood has changed since the Prime Minister's speech was broadcast, and all kinds of rumors are swirling through the air. The AVO's got its orders to fire on the crowd. They took the delegation down to the basement of the radio building and shot them. No, I heard that the delegates already gave their report and it didn't go over too well. There's talk of storming the building, do you hear up there, it

sounds like they're smashing the windows already. Who does Gero think he's fooling, so we're counter-revolutionaries in the pay of international fascism, what about this Nazi bullet I've still got in my leg, I'll ram it down that liar's throat. Let's go in there and burn the whole mess to the ground, we're all delegates here, aren't we? The father is shifting nervously from one foot to the other, craning his neck to see over the crowd. I have to find out what's happening, Magda, please wait here, I won't be more than a few minutes. Take me with you, Daddy. Are you sure about that, princess? Yes, I want to go with you. Please! Well, all right, darling, but you have to promise to behave yourself. No, Ferenc. What? I said no, you're not taking her, she's staying here with me, she could get killed, I shouldn't even let you go, but you're too stubborn. Mommy, I want to go with Daddy! No, is that clear, no! I gave in to you earlier, Ferenc, allow me this much and let the little one stay with me. All right, Magda, if you say so, I don't want to make a scene about it. The little girl has started to cry. As he turns to leave, the father remembers something and reaches into his coat pocket. Don't cry, darling, here's a little present because you've been so good tonight. He ceremoniously presents his daughter with a single rosebud. This flower has a story to tell you. It was born today. It is the spirit of all our friends here in the streets, of your mother and myself, and of you, of

course. It hasn't blossomed yet, as you can see. But if you take care of it, tomorrow you will have your very own flower. When it fades, it will pass into your heart, where you will guard it closely. Nobody will be able to take it away from you, just as nobody will be able to take this day away from us, come what may. The little girl kisses her father, and the mother taps him playfully on the chest. Tell me now, what's a good-for-nothing munitions worker like you speaking so poetically for, you never talked that way when you were courting me. Strange things happen in strange times like these, my love, anyway, I promise I'll be right back. Be careful, Ferenc, I do love you, you know. And I love you, Magda. Could you do the little one a favor before I come back, give her nose a good wiping, snot doesn't go too well with roses.

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Before we leave for lunch, Eddie tells me that he needs to speak with Anna about something and would I mind meeting her? He is looking at me slyly and I pretend indifference, saying sure, go ahead. We walk over to her desk; she is staring dreamily off into space. Eddie tiptoes directly behind her and abruptly grabs her shoulders, growling in his best Joe Grant imitation, "Back to work, chump!" Startled, she emits a high-pitched yelp, and when she sees Eddie laughing silently at her, she snorts, "Asshole." The affectionate

### The Beginning of the End



twinkle in her eyes belies the insult. "So what are you bugging me about now, Mister T? Boy trouble again? Take my advice, ditch the sucker and take a vow of chastity."

Now it is Eddie's turn to be embarrassed, much to my satisfaction. "Anna, speak a little louder so the whole building can hear about my business."

"Huh, who around here doesn't know your business? Speaking of business, are we still on for our rehearsal this evening?"

"We sure are. We can use the studio starting at 7, I checked with Lenvil and he said it's okay."

"Listen, do you mind if I bring Magda there?"

Eddie looks surprised. "Your daughter? Well, I don't know, Lenvil might freak out if he sees a little kid running around the studio, why can't you hire a sitter or something?"

"Eddie, when I was Magda's age my parents took me everywhere. I want to give my daughter that opportunity too. She's really good about not getting in the way, she loves to hear me sing, I'll be responsible for her if she creates problems, but I can guarantee you that she won't."

"Well, okay I guess. Oh Anna," he adds, "I want to introduce you to one of your devoted admirers." She seems highly amused at my lack of ease, and exclaims with a touch of malice, "Imagine an Entry wanting to meet me. At least I'm dressed for the occasion. I never forget a name-plate, you're the Keystroke Champion of the Week, aren't you? If I talk to you long enough, some of your efficiency might rub off on me, and Joe Grant wouldn't yell at me any more." She heaves a melodramatic sigh, but when she read the hurt on my face, she touches my hand gently, as if to make amends for her caustic words. "Sorry. I just find it hard to imagine that anyone here can go ahead and do their job as if they're blind to what's going on.

Didn't you read the leaflet that came out?" I tell her I did. "Well, take it seriously, then, 'cause that's what we're all up against. Why is it that when people have their own little worlds, they're in such a hurry to lock themselves up in them and throw away the key?" She blithely changes the subject before I can answer her. "Well, if you guys can hold on for a second, I'll escort you to the hallway. Nature calls."

She opens her desk drawer and takes out her purse. Striking a histrionic pose before the CRT, she brandishes her purse ferociously and screeches, "Insult a lady, would you? Take that, you beast!" The purse crashes against the top of the CRT, and with a hearty laugh, Anna grabs Eddie's arm and propels him out the door.

The sight of them hugging each other when I catch up with them in the hallway makes me feel out of place. Nevertheless, I try to make small talk by asking Anna where she comes from. "I was born in Hungary, my real name is Barontzay, but when my mother and I came to this country, we shortened it to Baron so the Americans wouldn't throw fits trying to pronounce or spell it."

"Was that a long time ago?"

"A while back," she responds curtly. For the first time, I look directly at her: curly shoulder-length brown hair, green eyes, small stature, but also a presence that breathes intensity. She doesn't occupy space so much as grasp it firmly. She conjures up a vision of something distant and remote; strange that someone with such earthy allure should evoke such misty associations. I interrupt my train of thought by blurting out, "Today's an important day for you, then."

Her head jerks back slightly. "What do you mean by that?"

"Oh... uh... I saw something in today's paper that said it was the 25th anniversary of the Hungarian Revo-



lution." Her hand caresses her face aimlessly, nervously. "So it's... an important day, not just for you, but for your country." My voice trails off when I see that she is not listening to me. Her gaze seems fixed somewhere on the ceiling, but she pulls herself together and says, "Yeah, an important day. Well, see you guys later, I'm off to the library."

While we are riding down to the cafeteria, Eddie asks me what all that was about. I tell him it has something to do with a dream, and he nods his head. "Strange things, dreams. But what would we do without them?"

"I don't know." For some reason, I am feeling euphoric. "I guess we'd all become Entries, or something."

"Ain't it the truth." Then, to the astonishment of the other elevator passengers, we look at each other and start laughing uproariously.

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can, the crowd surges forward and the little girl vanishes. The mother almost loses her balance in the crush and she reaches out instinctively for her daughter, only to realize that the little girl is gone. She plunges into the crowd, frantically calling her daughter's name, and almost immediately she stumbles upon a young man holding a shrieking child in his arms. Thank God you're safe. So this is your daughter, eh? What a pair of lungs she's got, so young and already a menace to the state. It's a good thing I saw her when I did, she could have been trampled. Thank you so much, comrade, and God bless you. The mother is too relieved to punish her daughter. I don't know what's gotten into you today, you're not like this usually, now stop squalling and stay close beside me. The little girl feels another scream welling up in her. She takes a deep breath — and then the loud crackle of machine-gun fire



The little girl is plotting the best way to distract her mother's attention so that she can dash into the crowd and look for her father. But she sees that her mother is daydreaming, so she figures that perhaps it would be best to tiptoe away quietly. Daddy will laugh so much when he hears what I did. While the little girl counts to ten under her breath, the mother worries about how late it is, why hasn't Ferenc come back, if they shoot, the dream's over, nothing, no matter how beautiful, is worth the loss of a human life. Eight, nine, ten, catch me if you

resounds from the radio building, jagged beams of light punctuate the darkness, an electric shock zigzags through the crowd, and suddenly everyone is running, colliding, trampling, screaming, bastards, they're slaughtering us, kill the cops. The little girl clutches at her mother's coat, trembling with fear. Magda, Magda! The mother hears her name being called. I'm over here! Here! Who is it? Then she sees her next-door neighbor staggering towards them, blood dripping from his leg. Magda, get out of here, both of you,

don't ask questions, just get out. Have you gone crazy, Janos, I can't leave without Ferenc, he said he'd be back any minute. Janos is swaying uncertainly, his face a bloodless mask, the words pouring out of him with the speed of delirium. Magda, listen to me, Ferenc's been shot, one of those AVO bastards did it, he was two feet away from me, it took him forever to fall, I can't forget the look

in his eyes, I've got to get to the factory, tell the boys on the nightshift, we disarmed the guards, but we need more weapons to deal with the rest. For God's sake, Magda, leave this place before they kill you too. The mother is rooted to the ground and her lips move inaudibly, perhaps in prayer, perhaps in a curse. The little girl feels the sudden rigidity of her mother's body and confusedly wonders if it has something to do with Daddy, and if Uncle Janos is to blame for it. She marches up to the wounded man, who is leaning on her mother's shoulder, and tries to push him away. I hate you! What did you do to my daddy! I want my daddy! Where is he? With frightful speed, the mother's hand shoots from her side and strikes the little girl a violent blow in the face. How dare you say that, you little brat! Magda, for God's sake, the child doesn't know what's going on. All right then, Janos, I'll tell her myself. Your father's dead. And those pigs killed him. Do you understand? Or do I have to hit you again to get it through your head? The little girl has started to run, her ears ringing from the shock and pain of the blow, her heart breaking from the horrible tone of her mother's voice, she trips, falls, and her mother snatches her up, sobbing desperately. I don't want them to kill you too, my little darling, you're all I have left, I love you so much, I was crazy, my poor love, forgive me, Ferenc. The mother is weeping now, and as the hot tears fall on her head, the little girl grips the flower that her father gave her until the thorn pierces her finger and drops of blood stain the pavement.

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Eddie and I are strolling down the hallway towards the office, unper-  
turbed at our 90-minute lunch break  
and even less concerned about incur-  
ring Joe Grant's wrath. But when we  
finally throw open the door, we glance

### How to Survive in Business Without Really Crying

*Monday morning I get out of bed,  
Take a shower and put on my head.  
Once I've done that, I put on my face.  
I'm getting ready for life in today's  
marketplace.*

*My office, you know, is a civilized place  
And, if I must go there, I'll do so with  
grace,  
Not like a prisoner, rattling my cage,  
Not like a savage, shaking with rage.  
It all goes so well when I start the day  
right.  
I can keep it together 'till I go home at  
night.*

*How long can I go without falling apart?  
Or getting a blood-clot lodged in my  
heart?*

*Asking such questions makes me shaky  
inside.*

*So, having paid for my ticket, let me just  
take my ride.*

*I really do love it, so I'll try to relax  
And always remember to cover my  
tracks.*

*That's a part of my life that the world  
must not see.*

*It will only accept a respectable me.*

Fran Now

cautiously at Grant's cubicle to see if he has spotted us. To our surprise, Anna is in there talking to Grant. Her irate expression and violent gestures tell us that the two of them are arguing about something. Suddenly, the cubicle door flies open and bangs against the wall, causing the flimsy construction to vibrate, and Anna storms out, shouting that she was leaving no matter what Grant said, because her daughter needed her. She rushes over to her desk to grab

weakness. "Her teacher said she had a nightmare during nap period, she woke up screaming 'They killed him, they killed him,' she's running a fever, the teacher sounded so worried, but this bastard wouldn't care if she died."

Grant is probably wishing that Anna were a fly so that he could carelessly brush her away and have done with her. "Miss Baron, I'm sure your kid's got nothing serious — nothing that the school nurse can't



her purse, but Grant is right behind her to bark in his best parade-ground manner, "Take one step out that door, Anna, and you're fired."

Stupefied, Anna freezes in her tracks and retreats to her desk. Grant, eagerly pressing his advantage, spreads his arms and addresses the office, "You can see for yourselves how much trouble this gal causes. And I've about had all I can take from her. No matter how patient I am, she insults me and tries to turn my troops against me. Now, when she comes and asks me for a favor, I tell her no, and can you blame me? I got rights, too, Miss Baron. If you tried to see things my way for once, you'd understand. As far as I'm concerned, the matter's closed."

Anna is keeping her head lowered so she doesn't have to look at Grant, and exclaims in a barely audible hiss, "My daughter's sick, and that asshole won't let me go to see her, even though he heard her crying over the phone." Her voice quavers, but she is determined not to show any

handle, anyway. You can do what you want after five, but until then, you've got a job to do."

He slams shut his cubicle door and sits down at his desk with his back to us. A silence follows that would be deafening were it not for the incessant humming of the computer equipment. Anna is rummaging aimlessly through her desk as if in a trance, muttering something that sounds like "It had to be today." For lack of anything better to do, everyone gradually returns to work, and the fugal build-up of keyboard sound galvanizes Anna into action. She grabs her coat and purse and walks over to Eddie. "Listen, babe, I made up my mind, I'm gonna call his bluff. Maybe he won't know I'm gone, I've just got to see Magda, there's a lot I have to tell her, I know why she feels the way she does."

Eddie is tense and worried. "Anna, he's bound to notice it if you leave. He's gonna fire you, I don't think he's bullshitting, he wants any excuse to get rid of the troublemakers in this unit so

that when these quotas go into effect, everyone here'll be too scared to fight them." "Eddie, I don't care if he fires me. Do you want to know why?" There is a note of urgency in her voice. "'Cause I trust you to do the right thing if he does. All this time we've talked about what to do if Grant puts the screws on, and now that it's happening, we have to think in terms of miracles. Today especially." She turns to me when she notices that I am listening attentively. "Earlier, you said today was an important day for me, but you couldn't have known how important it really was. You see, I was in Budapest when the revolution began, outside the radio building with my parents. My father was killed when the security police fired into the crowd. I never told anyone about this, I kept it a secret all my life. I was only five when it happened, and it hurt me very much." She passes her hand over her eyes. "That's why Magda's sick, it's her way of telling me that she knows about the grief I've been carrying inside me all these years, she must have second sight, intuition, whatever, this morning she asked me, mommy, why is that rose in your hair, and I couldn't say that it was how I wanted to remember my father and the dream he died for. I don't know why I'm going on like this, I must be more upset than I thought."

don't know what's coming up, but I'll do my best when it does."

Anna checks Grant's cubicle to make sure that his back is still turned, takes a deep breath, and says, "It's now or never. Too bad it had to turn out this way, but it's wonderful to have your support. With people like you around, I'm beginning to think maybe my father's dreams weren't so crazy after all. Please call me later on, Eddie, and tell me what happened."

"Don't worry," I say, "the main thing is that you have a right to see your daughter because it's an emergency, and Grant can't stop you, he'll have to fire all of us."

"Well, people are the least of his worries, he might just do that. I really gotta go, bye, and thanks a lot, really."

She is gone, but the scent of her rose lingers in the air as if to remind us that even in this office, marvelous things can happen. My chest contracts and my hands start to tremble, whether from excitement or fear I am not sure. Grant hasn't budged for almost half an hour, maybe he won't turn around for the rest of the day. But with three hours left, he'll be sure to think of something to tell his employees sooner or later. Here it comes, he's swiveling his chair around, he's stunned when he spots Anna's empty desk and realizes that

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**“How about going on strike?” I decide to be bold; how else can miracles happen?**

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Eddie reaches forward and tenderly grasps Anna's hand. "Go and see your daughter, Anna. If Grant fires you, there's a good chance nobody here will put up with it. A lot of folks here care for you, you should have heard them this morning, they defended you in front of Grant, we have to count on that happening again. It's like when we improvise together, I

she actually disobeyed him, he's in such hurry to get up that he bangs his knee on the desk, but he hobbles out nonetheless, and instead of launching into a tirade, he merely says, "So she left after all, well, she made her choice, now I'm gonna make mine."

He re-enters his cubicle, and taking care to rub his bruised knee tenderly, he puts his feet on the desk and picks



up the telephone. He must be telling Personnel to prepare Anna's dismissal papers. Everyone in the office is watching him closely. He hangs up the receiver and moves his chair over to the file cabinet, from which he extracts a manila folder, Anna's personnel record, no doubt. He's really going through with it, he doesn't seem to care, it's all in a day's work for him, so it's pointless to be surprised or shocked when once again, he limps out of his cubicle to announce off-handedly that he's got some business to take care of in Personnel, troops, and he'll return in half an hour.

But all hell breaks loose once the door has safely closed behind him, and now I understand that my fellow workers needed Anna's presence as much as I did. Poor Anna, this place won't be the same without her, she always helped me with my work, Grant was threatened by her, he hates women, he'd be happier if we were all robots, I can't believe he actually fired her, where's the justice, it could be any one of us, nobody here likes working for him, what can we do?

With the shrewdness of a born agitator, Eddie seizes his opportunity and leaps on top of his desk. "I just heard the \$64,000 question, what can we do? Well, we all know what we're up against, don't we?" He points an imaginary microphone at the others and assumes the satin-smooth demeanor of a talk-show host. "Come

on, ladies and gentlemen, surely you can tell me. Just pretend it's lunchtime and you're all sitting around bad-mouthing this place like you always do." Mattie decides to join the game first and, in a voice of world-weary conviction that arouses sympathetic laughter in a few of the younger people, sighs, "Too many damn cards to process." Someone else stands up and says, "We get paid an average \$700 a month to bust our asses, that's bullshit." Eddie covers his ears in mock embarrassment, "Well Mister Howe, you got your point across, that's for sure. Let's hear a little more of that rough kind of talk."

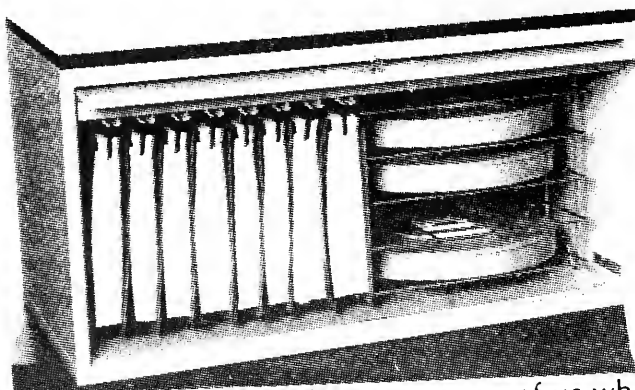
Soon, infected by Eddie's playful mood, everybody starts trying to outdo each other's complaints, no windows, stale air, double vision, migraine headaches all the time, no telephones, no freedom of speech, no justice, until Eddie waves his arms for silence.

"Thank you so much, it's not often I encounter such a wonderful audience, I love you all. But one thing's bugging me. You all been sitting on these gripes for so long you haven't figured out what we can do about them."

"How about going on strike?" I decide to be bold; how else can miracles happen?

"You all heard the man, sounded like he said the magic word, s-t-r-i-k-e. But it ain't magic unless we all want

# ARE YOU "UP IN ARMS" OVER BINDER, DISC AND TAPE FILING?



Well, you're not alone! There are many of us who understand that the bulk of the "information handling" we do is useful only to those who profit from the existing order. We are sick of this **world** system, based on authority and wasteful, boring work. If you are "up in arms," write to us and tell us about your situation. If you have any ideas about tactics and strategy, **Processed World** is an open forum for your ideas to reach a large number of office workers. Write to:

Processed World  
55 Sutter St. #829

San Francisco, CA 94104

to make it real."

"I agree," one of the younger men says, "if Anna can't work here, nobody should work here."

"Nobody should work here, period, I wouldn't wish this place on a dog."

Eddie bursts out laughing. "Mister Howe's hit it on the nose. Why should anyone work here? That's the kind of question we have to ask. And if we haven't all left our imaginations inside those CRT's we might even come up with some good answers. I've said all I have to say, ladies and gentlemen. We haven't got much time before Grant gets back, so let's start planning a nice surprise for him."

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Anna is sitting on the steps of the plaza and watching her daughter. The little girl is shouting strike, strike amidst the laughter and applause of the small group of picketers blocking the building entrance. Although our leaflets have been very well received, with many people taking piles of copies into the building to distribute, I am getting bored with handing them out and with the litany of hi-Unit-12's-on-strike-and-we-need-your-support-thank-you. So I give my leaflets to somebody else on the line and walk over to Anna. Even after a weekend of strike meetings, I still feel somewhat awkward around her, and her distant, preoccupied greeting does nothing to dispel this feeling. But when I notice how pale and drawn she is, I say to

myself, of course, she's been under a lot of strain recently, what with everything happening so fast. I sit down beside her and try to draw her into conversation by complimenting her on her daughter and how nice it was to have her with us today.

"Yeah, Magda's something else, it's scary how much alike we are. She's just the way I was at her age. She loves being the center of attention, and she'll do all she can to stay there, even if it means yelling herself hoarse. Speaking of Magda, I heard from her father this morning."

"Oh really?" This is the first time Anna has mentioned her ex-husband, as far as I can tell.

"Uh-huh, he heard about the strike on the radio, so he called to wish me good luck but to keep Magda out of trouble, he knows I'd take her anywhere. So I told him thanks for the good wishes and he can have her next weekend. He's a nice guy, but he doesn't understand a lot of things, he's too wrapped up in his job, that's why we split up."

I change the subject. "So he heard about us on the radio, wonder how the news got out."

Anna gestures towards Eddie, who is standing off to the side of the picket line and playing a lively tune on his saxophone. "You can thank Take-Charge Eddie over there, he's in his element with this strike." I ask her what that element might be. "The spotlight, of course. Whenever we play duets, I'm constantly reminding him that we're partners and he can't always be out front. Somebody here has to tell him that, otherwise he'll want everything to go his way. Sorry if I'm bumming you out or anything, I'm really tired today, I can't get up the right amount of righteous fervor, there's too much on my mind."

I can tell that Anna wants to be left alone with her thoughts, but just as I am getting up to return to the picket line, I hear someone calling her name. A friend of hers who works in one of

the other units is running towards us, and Anna brightens up immediately when she sees her. I feel superfluous, but since I don't want to go back and hand out leaflets, I hover around them to find out if Daria is bringing any important news.

"Hey Daria, I've been waiting for you to call me like you said you would."

"I didn't try this weekend 'cause I knew you were busy stirring up trouble. I love what you guys are doing, imagine, Unit 12 on strike, Grant's a candidate for heart failure, you should see him, it's fantastic."

Anna smiles ironically at her friend. "Well if you really think so, maybe you should get a sympathy strike going in your unit, things can't be that much better there."

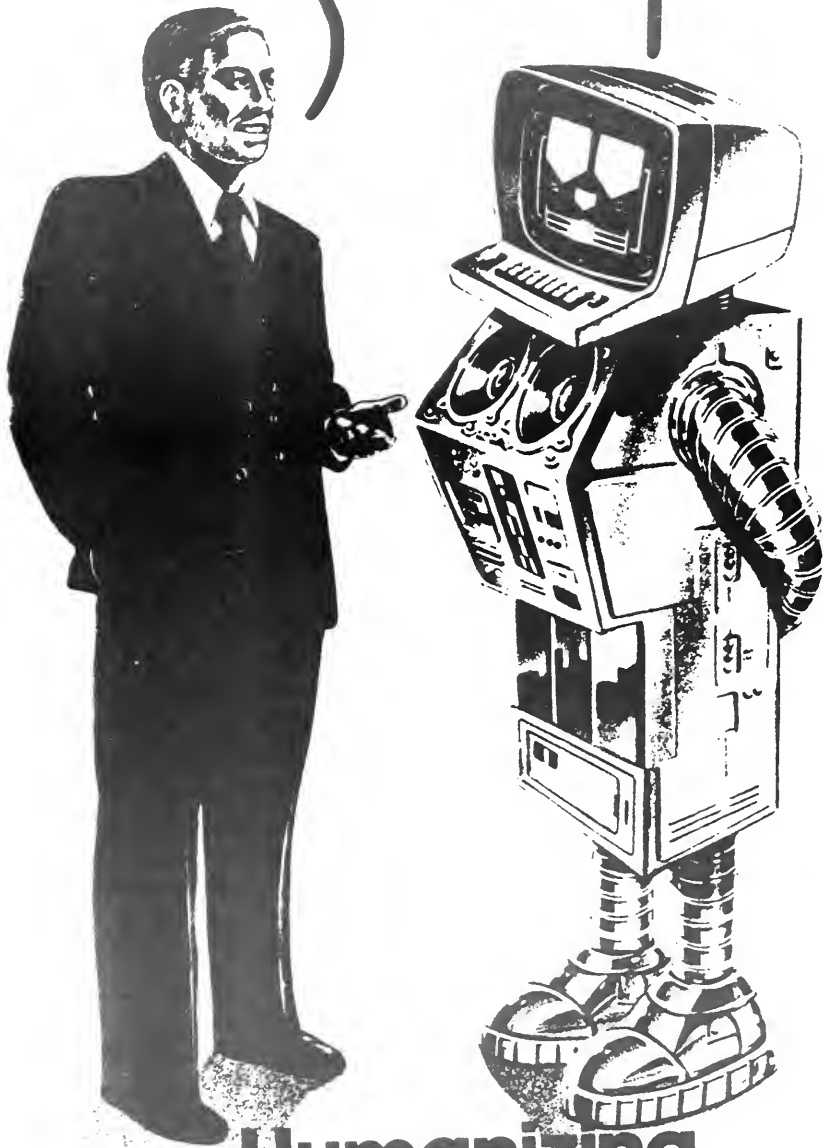
Daria looks at the ground, shuffling her feet back and forth. "It's not the same where we are, Billings is an okay boss. Anyway, we're all behind you, we read your leaflet. Besides," she adds, her voice gaining assurance, "if it weren't for me, you wouldn't know that the Unit 12 temporaries are all ready to quit, I talked to one of them a few minutes ago, he's going crazy trying to figure out the work, everything's a total mess." Daria glances around as if afraid to be overheard. "Incidentally, Anna, I heard that about 2,000 input cards have disappeared from Unit 12, is it true?"

"All I can say is, I wasn't there at the time they decided to go on strike, so you'll have to ask someone else, not that you'll ever find out. But we aren't playing games with this strike, that's for sure."

"You don't have to take that tone with me, Anna, I came to help you, not spy on you. I'm here because I just found out from Davis' secretary that the company's going to use trespassing laws to keep you folks away from the building. I wanted to warn all of you that you might have the cops on your hands any minute.

Y'know, since you've  
been around I've felt  
more like a man than  
ever before!

Oh Bob! you've made me  
feel so human!



## Humanizing the interface with electronic systems



Anna, are you alright?" For Anna appears ready to faint, and only Daria's embrace prevents her from collapsing to the pavement. "Anna, it's so unlike you to be afraid, what's wrong?"

Anna's words emerge with great effort. "It can't happen like this again... not the police... they'll kill us." She clutches Daria and gazes fixedly at her. "Please Daria, help me, help my little girl, you know where I live, take her home, Mary Anne in Number 8 will look out for her, I don't want anything to happen to her, not the way it happened to me, she's just like me, I'm so frightened for her."

Daria is astounded. "Sure, I guess. ...I'll think up an excuse for leaving work... alright, I'll drive her home. But I don't understand, the cops won't kill you, they'll just ask you to leave."

I pull Daria aside and whisper to her that Anna's been through a lot lately, and maybe it would be best for us to tell the others about the police's imminent arrival while Anna went to get Magda. Daria nods understandingly and we both hurry over to the picket line. The news produces its expected effect on my fellow strikers, but for some reason I cannot concentrate on the heated discussion that follows. Instead, I look across the plaza and see Anna and Magda sitting next to each other on the steps, talking animatedly.

It is clear from the way Magda is behaving that she is reluctant to leave, no matter how reasonably her mother speaks to her; she is shaking her head vigorously and refuses to look directly at Anna, who loses patience and yanks her daughter to her feet. At this Magda goes limp. Nothing daunted, her mother proceeds to drag her across the plaza, and the little girl starts shrieking with rage. You're hurting me, Mommy, let go, I hate you. Anna wheels around

violently and for a moment it looks like she is going to hit the little girl, but she restrains herself and, to my surprise and relief, lifts her daughter into her arms and hugs her tightly. After whispering a few soothing words into Magda's ear, Anna sets her gently on the ground, wipes her face, and takes hold of her hand. Magda is smiling now, and Anna looks as if a great weight has been lifted from her shoulders.

"Until you've met my daughter, you don't know what stubborn means," says Anna when she reaches the picket line. "Her grandfather would have loved her, what else can I do but let her stay here with us? Thanks, Daria, I guess you're off the hook now. You guys decide what to do about the cops?"

"Nobody can agree on anything, so we'll just wait and see what happens," Eddie says, and at that moment the shriek of a police siren cuts through the noise of the downtown traffic. Two paddy wagons careen onto the sidewalk, disgorging thirty patrolmen in riot gear, one of whom is carrying a bullhorn. "Hey, Eddie," somebody says, "how about giving the men in blue a tune to brighten up their day." Eddie snorts contemptuously, but when he sees Anna and Magda talking quietly to each other, he puts his horn to his lips and begins to play a long, elegiac melody, aching with loss at first but gradually brightening towards a hopeful mood. Anna's face clouds over as she recognizes the tune and suddenly she begins to sing in a low passionate voice, Mama may have, Papa may have, but God bless the child who's got his own, and all I can hear is her song, there is nothing else in the world, not even the crackling mechanical sound of the police sergeant reading the dispersal order.

— *By Christopher Winks*



# DOWN TIME!

## Basic Principles of Resistance (Bulletin #8 — Solidarity)

*The following is some practical advice for workers in any job or country. It was published underground by the Warsaw chapter of Solidarity, dated December 30, 1981.*

1. During a strike or other form of protest, stay with your colleagues.
2. Do not establish Strike Committees. Protect your leaders and organizers. Basic principle of action: the entire crew goes on strike — there are no leaders.
3. In contacts with the police or the military you are uninformed, you know nothing, you have heard nothing.
4. Do not denounce ordinary people. Your enemies are: the policeman, the eager conformist, the informer.
5. Work slowly; complain about the mess and incompetence of your supervisors. Shove all decisions, even the most minor, into the lap of commissars and informers. Flood them with questions and doubts. Don't do their thinking for them. Pretend you are a moron. Do not anticipate the decisions of commissars and informers with a servile attitude. They should do all the dirty work themselves. In this way you create a void around them,

and by flooding them with the most trivial matters you will cause the military-police apparatus to come apart at the seams.

6. Eagerly carry out even the most idiotic orders. Do not solve problems on your own. Throw that task onto the shoulders of commissars and informers. Ridiculous rules are your allies. Always remember to help your friends and neighbors regardless of the martial law rules.
7. If you are instructed to break mutually contradictory rules, demand written orders. Complain. Try to prolong such games as long as possible. Sooner or later the commissar will want to be left in peace. This will mark the beginning of the end of the dictatorship.
8. As often as possible take sick leave to care for an "ill" child.
9. Shun the company of informers, conformists and their ilk.
10. Take active part in the campaign to counter official propaganda, spreading information about the situation in the country and examples of resistance.
11. Paint slogans, hang posters on walls and distribute leaflets. Pass on independent publications — but be cautious.

*Reprinted from the Bay Area Solidarity Support Campaign Bulletin, March 1982, No. 1; 55 Sutter St. #832, San Francisco, CA 94104*

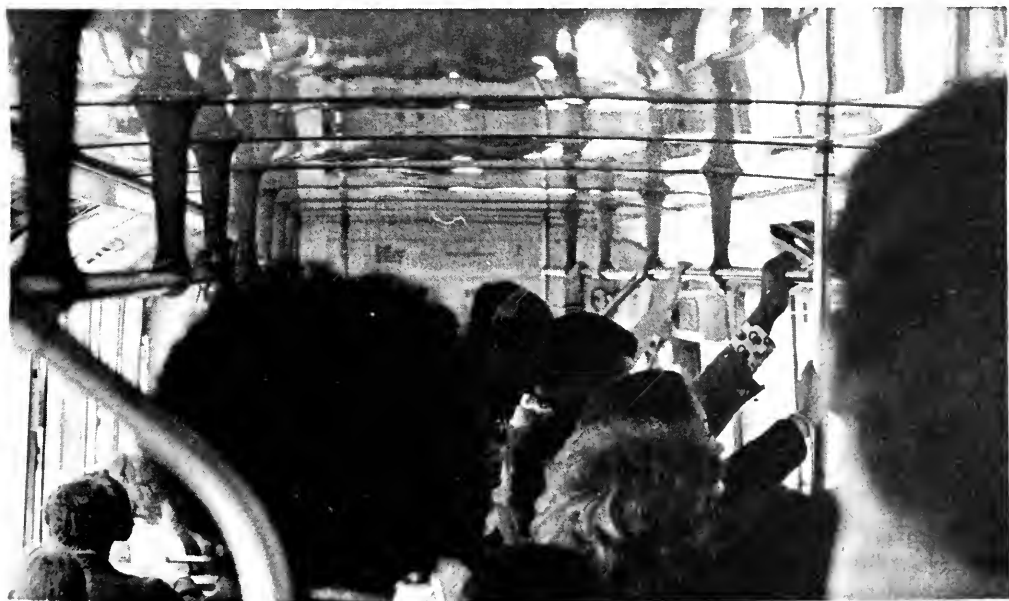
## SF Supes Bolster Sagging City Worker Unions

In early February, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted in "agency shop" representation for city workers. Many clerical workers, librarians, social workers and pharmacists resented the imposition of agency shop and collected signatures from 30% of their co-workers so they could vote on the issue. In a February 26th vote, city clerical workers agreed to this representation with 1203 voting for it and 1076 against.

"Agency shop" basically means that "as a condition of employment" you must pay money to the union. You need not formally join the union, but you must pay a monthly "service fee" of \$11 to \$13. The "service fee" is a

euphemism for compulsory union dues checkoff, which has traditionally been relied upon by union bureaucracies that cannot get workers to sign up voluntarily. Through the guaranteed income provided by automatic dues, the bureaucrats become direct beneficiaries of the wage-labor setup. In return, these "experts" provide the "services" of collective bargaining and grievance processing to their "clients," who are encouraged to let the union handle all their working problems. Prior to the ratification election, we visited City Hall to talk with some city workers. Although nearly everyone we spoke to favored the idea of union representation, "Nobody likes the way the decision

# COMMUTE



# NIGHTMARE

was imposed," said an already unionized keypunch operator.

A few years ago SEIU 400 sent an organizer around to get her to join the union, the first union representative she had met in three years. She told him, "I'd already belong if it was a good union."

In her opinion — one we often heard repeated — SEIU 400 "doesn't do anything for us." She explained how the union had been in labor conciliation "court" three years ago to fight for 12 month retroactive wage increases that the City had impounded in a cost-cutting move. Local 400 lawyers immediately agreed to accept only seven months back pay, making no attempt to secure the additional five. As for the union's claims about successful collective bargaining, she scoffed: "What did they get us last year? 2%? And the cost of living increased how much? 16%?"

A unionized librarian had mixed feelings. He could understand why the union wanted the money, but he could also understand people's resistance to being "shanghaied."

One clerk who was in favor of agency shop was asked how her co-workers felt. "They don't want it now; nobody wants anything in the beginning; they don't want to pay the money." Hired through CETA over a year earlier, she wasn't a union member but planned to join. She knew nothing concrete about what the union had done for workers in the past.

Most likely, SF supervisors have passed this agency shop ruling as a political favor to union leaders. But it also demonstrates the City government's interest as an employer in workforce stability. SEIU 400, the local that stands to gain the most, has a long record of being in cahoots with governmental employers (see "No Paid Officials" in this issue for more on SEIU 400's history).

The agency shop agreement is

actually aimed at strengthening weak, unpopular unions. For the time being, it may succeed. Meanwhile, though, city employees will continue to meet with each other around the concession stands, water coolers, and lunch tables, trying to figure out how to protect the limited freedom they have — and, perhaps, how to extend it beyond the limits enforced by union bureaucrats, managers and politicians.



## Justifiable Terminal-icide

Frankfurt, West Germany —

A judge dismissed charges of malicious damage against an insurance company bookkeeper who attacked his VDT with a chair, and then set it on fire. The dismissal came after the bookkeeper explained his patience had been exhausted when the system went on the blink for the 5th time in as many hours. The judge noted that the bookkeeper regularly had been forced to work long hours of overtime to catch up on work that was delayed by system failures.

— 1/29/82

AFL-CIO Newspaper Guild Reporter



# Confidence Crisis For Middle Management

*Every office worker knows how utterly useless "middle management" personnel can be, even within the general uselessness of office work. Now, perhaps goaded by the threat of automation, they themselves have begun to worry about it. The following is quoted from a keynote speech given at a company-wide meeting for Directors of Administration and Personnel. The context seems to be that many office managers at Arthur Andersen have been treated as less important because they are responsible for office support rather than the more "glamorous" management field work... Emphasis is ours.*

"... top management recognizes that there is a 'class' distinction problem...

First, we must recognize and become totally convinced that administration of office operations and personnel is indeed a profession. We must acknowledge to ourselves the worthiness of our work, before we can proceed any further. For many of us that is a difficult step to take. We desperately want to believe it...

... So we, as a group, must recognize and become totally convinced that administration is a profession in and of itself. We must recognize that this profession is integral to the process of management. We do provide meaningful service. Dr. Morrison will help us in making that recognition...

... among the suggested issues [for discussion this afternoon] are several points that will help to generate additional thought about who we are, what we do, and the appropriate roles for us in our offices...

... Dr. Morrison will also be preparing you for the task of winning recognition of your role. Tomorrow, he will be discussing the area of "psychological contracts." And Friday he will discuss "building your own support." And Herb Cohen will conclude the meeting by discussing your personal power — how to find it and how to use it effectively.

I want you to know that we have not gone to this expense and effort to simply make you feel good about yourselves... I believe the investment this firm is making in you to be well worth the ultimate cost. Because I



believe that the administration of office and personal resources is very much a part of our total client service effort. But the investment you make in yourselves will generate the greatest return for both *you and the firm*. (Emphasis in original)

... Historically, the firm has tended to equate the concept of "support" with the concept of "subordinate." It did not recognize the mutual dependence involved. It imposed a false and unrealistic segregation between two groups of people...

... We have established the policy that the partnership door is indeed open to people in administration. I cannot guarantee that the opportunity to partnership is as open as you would like it to be. But the door is neither closed nor locked...

... We intend to tighten our standards for recruiting administration personnel and for keeping them on the payroll. Any efforts we make in the office to upgrade the overall image of administration will not succeed, unless we support those efforts with a sound system to keep the dead wood out...

... The most important action [taken by the firm] is that we have now opened some minds and attitudes to the point that you have the opportunity to take control of your personal destiny."

*Thanks to our friends among the office staff at Arthur Andersen & Co. for sending this in!*



# The Craig Agency

44 Montgomery St., Wells Fargo Building, San Francisco, California 94104



M E M O

TO: ALL ASSOCIATES

FROM: BETSY

SUBJECT: RESTROOM KEY

ONCE AGAIN THE RESTROOM KEY IS MISSING. WOULD EACH ONE OF YOU TAKE TWO MINUTES TO CHECK AROUND FOR IT. I KNOW THIS IS REAL UNIMPORTANT TO YOU NOW, BUT SOMETIME SOON IT'S IMPORTANCE MAY CHANGE, IF YOU GET MY DRIFT.

WHEN EACH OF YOU FIRST WALKED THROUGH THE DOOR YOU WERE GIVEN A KEY TO THE FRONT DOOR. THIS KEY WILL OPEN THE BATHROOM DOORS. IF YOU HAVE LOST YOUR KEY, THE BUILDING WILL MAKE ANOTHER ONE FOR YOU FOR A SLIGHT FEE, \$1 I THINK. IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, I STRONGLY SUGGEST YOU GET ONE. WE WILL NOT BE SUPPLYING THEM ONCE A WEEK. ALSO, IF YOUR SECRETARY DOES NOT HAVE ONE, PERHAPS YOU WOULD LIKE TO BUY HER AN EARLY CHRISTMAS OR HANUKKAH PRESENT.

BELIEVE ME, I FULLY REALIZE THE RIDICULOUSNESS OF THIS MEMO, BUT I HAVE SPENT ABOUT TWO HOURS DISCUSSING THIS WITH INDIVIDUAL PEOPLE AND IT IS BECOMING A MAJOR CRISIS IN MY LIFE. PLEASE CHECK AROUND AND LET ME KNOW HOW MANY KEYS YOU'D LIKE TO ORDER.

HAPPY TRAILS TO YOU.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Betsy".

BETSY



The Typist Addresses  
Her IBM Selectric  
1,000,000 MemoryWriter 250D

Dear Sir:

Weekdays I start your heart at 8. Maybe I'll take you to the beach some Saturday. Would you like to come to church with me? Say yes, Please say yes!

Disappointment. I'm so used to it I can't imagine life without it. The buses don't come when they're supposed to, my toilet runs, last week some kids ran my cat over on purpose and screeched off laughing-the police lost the license number (I gave them my copy I'd written down and then RAN to a phone booth and found the nearest precinct and took a cab there), LOST IT! nothing works, everyone's evil or incompetent, except you...

You can take a mistake and make it disappear on the spot quick as I can move, and I move fast, and you've got everything in your perfect little brain somewhere under that grainy black surface.

What a head for #s! Will your memory fail when you get old and all the young computers titter? Don't worry, I won't let them. I can tell you like my humming as we sail along, your margin bell always dings in perfect time. We make such beautiful music together!

Just for toi (mon cher) I stayed up past midnight two weeks straight memorizing your instruction booklet, not w word for word of course, like you do, but I still know enough to keep my lambykins happy and healthy as a paid vacation. I'm even considering going to night school to learn to repair you. Then we can play doctor! tres kinky, my magic little box of beckoning electrodes, my double-spacing demon.

Oh, sometimes I feel so clumsy next to you and your perfect borders. But you need me a little too. What a team we are! Translating their horrid chickenscratch into such wonderful black&white symmetry. I love to just sit there and watch you type out a whole letter from memory...Once I went out with a guy who sounded exactly like you when he walked, I think he was a tap dancer, he bored me, but you turn me on so much, so very very much much much.

And how you toy with me!! You know how jealous I am. MR. POPULARITY around the office, you are; you never take the last cup of coffee in the pot and scald the bottom, like some people I won't mention, and the supervisor loves you because you may break down once in a long long while but never every cry, (like some other people named Marianne Anderson who shall remain anonymous, don't think I don't see the way that bitch looks at you and brushes against your carriage when she flits by..

One of these days I'm going to take you home forever, my little pumpkin, put you on my lap once and for all and we can sit in front of the tv happily ever after, maybe write a letter together every once in a while, maybe, not. I have a dimmer dial in my bedroom, and...oh I can't stand it, quit playing with my heart you dark brute, it's almost time for break and parting is such sweet sorrow, vur I must or they'll talk, thsy'll talk talk talk talk talk, my fingers ~~xxx~~stips are on fire with a love-pink glow.

Dearest, I'm yours,

*Julie Capalet*

Julie (Capalet)





**That Office!** Presented by Gulf of the Farallones, Inc. a non-profit theater group; written by Melinda Mills, directed by Karl Danskin, performed by Patricia Falvey, Carol Loud and Lisa Brown.

**That Office!** was conceived, written and performed by and for clerical workers. Author Melinda Mills wrote the script after a stint as a secretary, and director Karl Danskin sought out actresses with experience in the office world. The original intention of the company was to perform for office workers during lunch-hours in San Francisco and Oakland's financial districts. Afternoon performances have been limited, however, due to bad weather and problems finding indoor performance space.

Given the radical content of the play, it is not surprising that the company received little response to requests for performance space in office lounges and cafeterias. Hopefully, *That Office!* will be played in financial district parks come spring.

The company's attempt to involve the audience in the performance links them to the avant-garde project of dissolving the separation between spectators and performers, art and life. A rejection of the notion of art as a privileged sphere and artists as stars removed from the humdrum of daily life is implicit in the performance. "Theatrical" conventions are downplayed. The actors use little make-up and mingle with the audience after the show, while set and structure are reduced to a bare, but effective minimum. The set — consisting of a desk, chair and cardboard imitations of a typewriter, filing cabinet and other assorted office furnishings — is stylized but realistic, with the genuine look and feel of an office. That this should be so well conveyed by plain cardboard is an

ingenious comment on how bland and colorless most offices are.

As in Brechtian theater, the performance is not just *entertainment* or diversion, nor is it designed to overwhelm the viewer with spectacular effects, but rather to incite her to critical reflection. At the same time, and contrary to Brecht's theory, we can readily identify with "the secretary," the main character in the play.

The starkness of the play contrasts sharply with its emotional impact. People in the audience frequently remarked how much the play confirmed their own experiences. The petty tasks that make up the day's routine, the bosses' crass, sexist, infantile behavior and their grotesque expectations of the secretary, along with her own fantasies, self-delusions, humiliation and despair, are summed up in a series of short prose-poems which form a bitter, yet humorous condemnation of the tragic waste of human life-time that goes on in "that office", i.e. *any* office.

Some of the most insightful moments in the play are also the most



She becomes the aggressive seductress.

painful. For example, the secretary's sexual fantasies expose the contradictory ways that sexual tensions and frustrations are internalized and played out in the imagination. The bosses, personified in Peggy's disdainful descriptions and as taped voices, are insensitive, idiotic and immature:

*Have you ever seen grown adults — adult men — who get paid fifty grand a year acting like children? Well they do! They throw tantrums, act silly, try to make you laugh, demand that you do things for them immediately. It's too much! Those men! My two always want graham crackers and milk at 2 PM. Then they put their heads down and take a nap!... And they throw a fit if I answer the phone "Mister" instead of "Doctor" — people think they have the wrong number! And one of them is always losing his socks and he whines until I look all over his office and find them for him. How do their wives handle them? I just don't know.*

Yet in her erotic fantasies,

#### The Woman

*rubs up against the handle of the paper cutter while she sorts the mail,  
and longs to grab the man she works for by the balls, fuck him till he can't stand up, then walk back to her desk and type up the Quarterly Report to the Chief.*



As a woman, she  
tantalizes the heterosexual man.

The bureaucrat-business man  
seething with  
semen, like warm mayonnaise filling  
the hot receptacles between his legs,  
desires a woman to assist him with his  
necessary duties.

At these moments the secretary becomes the aggressive seductress, proving herself on "their" terms. Most audiences have come to accept critical portrayals of sex roles and how certain kinds of behavior are imposed on women, but few women are willing to own up to the darker secrets of desire. Certain uptight people may feel outraged and shocked by these scenes. On the other hand, I noticed they were also received with loud — perhaps overloud — laughter from some women in the audience.

The effort to confront the reality of office life in all its emptiness ("This is reality?" the secretary asks herself unbelievably at one point) sometimes exaggerates its coldness. The play neglects the small complicities, the

moments of warmth and understanding shared with co-workers that help pass the time, and without which the workday would be completely insufferable.

Not that the secretary appears altogether dehumanized. One of the main sources of dramatic tension in the play comes from a sense of the chasm that exists between the selfless, efficient "down-to-earth" automaton the secretarial role demands, and the secretary's own (very human) longings for tenderness and passion.

In a wonderful counterpoint scene, the secretary muses tenderly about a man in the office to whom she feels attracted. Meanwhile, on the other side of the stage, one of the "other secretaries" (there are two of them on stage at all times) offers a stream of banalities, ostensibly as practical advice to a woman questioning the direction of her life:

*It's your choice you know  
Only you can get what you want from  
life  
It's up to you  
You're still young enough to change  
careers  
you could easily make  
All the necessary arrangements*

In another, less successful segment, "A Woman", the vision of the "womanly" side of the character borders on sentimentalism:

*The Woman  
  
is  
flowing-out  
blowing-about  
crowing-to-be  
sewing-up  
knowing-why  
growing-with*

In general, however, this tension helps convey a sense of rebelliousness which contrasts with the feeling of resignation that pervades "Stuck," another play about the office world

performed at Fort Mason by the Magic Theater in late 1981. Like *That Office!*, *Stuck* presents familiar office characters in a familiar setting — "stuck" in a traffic jam on the way to and from work. The play was innovatively staged in a large warehouse with real cars. At its best, *Stuck* offers a realistic picture of the hypocrisy, emptiness and deep frustrations that abound in the office world. But although we can recognize the characters portrayed, we do not identify with them. It's not just that they're unsympathetic, but rather that the author has not gotten under their skin, as Mills does in *That Office!* The grossest example of the superficiality of *Stuck* was the stereotype of a female file clerk as a mindless nymphomaniac, who seems neither to want nor to deserve any better than her lowly position in the office — except sex.

If it weren't for the poetry and humor of the script, and the charm of the actress, *That Office!* might be a depressing play. As it is, the subversive possibilities of humor and irony are ingeniously exploited in sections like "The Variety of Possibilities," which ridicules the rhetoric of freedom and individual opportunity, often used to assuage the consciences of those who have achieved wealth and power:

*The variety of possibilities  
always apparent  
just within my reach  
  
the endless variety  
of possibilities  
young, white and American  
even being a female doesn't  
hurt my chances that much  
does it?*

*that dreaded variety  
of possibilities  
how can I possibly turn down  
so many opportunities?*

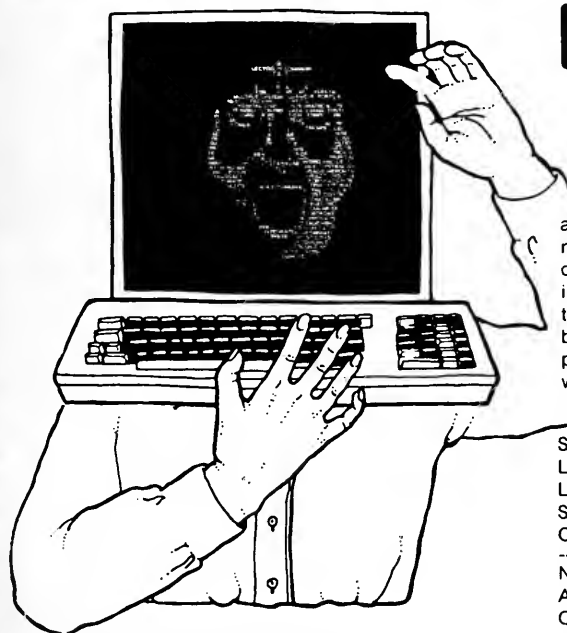
Coming from a captive in the office, this cliché leaves a bitter taste in one's mouth. Other choice bits are "Hilarity" ("If I could just keep laughing, everything would be OK) and "Insanity." In the latter, the three characters comically repeat familiar phrases "Things are crazy here. This job is making me crazy. His wife is insanely jealous." In the context that has been created, the casual daily references to insanity take on a deeper meaning. We are made aware of the naked truth to which daily usage of these words has numbed us.

Unfortunately, the quality of performance varied in the two shows I saw. Nonetheless, Patricia Falvey (who acts in the evening performances) is a very powerful actress, and for the most part skillfully handles the extraordinary variety of moods in the play. The script itself is very demanding, as it concentrates atten-

tion on the main actress throughout most of the play. The two supporting actresses functioned as part of the set during most of the performance — repeating mimed office chores. More interaction with the supporting actresses might have relieved the occasionally taxing focus on the secretary's monologue. The rare variations in staging were welcome. Particularly successful was the use of a cranky displaying a poem against a sonic backdrop of taped animal noises.

The best scene involving all three actresses was the closing finale, "Am I the Only One?", an animated dance routine to a tune resembling "La Bamba." The trio's obvious enjoyment in this scene was contagious, and provides an answer to the question "Am I the Only One?" The answer is no, and *That Office!*'s portrayal of an individual's experience in the clerical world goes a long way in showing us why.

— By Maxine Holz



## PROCESSED WORLD

A totally underground publication, *Processed World* accepts no advertisements and is supported entirely by readers' donations. Produced by a fluctuating group of dissidents and malcontents, most of whom are working in SF's Financial District as "information handlers," the magazine has been established to facilitate contact between dissatisfied, rebellious office workers, and to provide an outlet for critical reflections on the modern world.

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The following people helped produce **Processed World #4**. Thanks to everyone who contributed creatively or financially to the project.

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**CAN YOU FIND THE PROCESSED WORLD  
STAFF IN THIS PICTURE?**





From Frans Masereel, *The Passionate Journey*